

‘What Lies Beneath: Orthodoxy and the Occult in Victorian Literature’

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Abstract

Victorian society was fascinated by the issue of spiritual life after death. For the ever-rationalising Victorians, any hint of uncertainty proved troubling: the drive to explain and categorise the world led to unparalleled advances in science, technology and communication. But scientific knowledge itself, most notably in the work of Darwin and his theories of evolution, undermined the concept of eternal life as promised by orthodox Christianity, prompting Victorian society to seek other modes of belief that might offer empirical evidence of life after death.

This thesis explores the relationship between orthodox Christianity, quasi-religious movements, pseudo-science and the supernatural in both a pre- and post-Darwinian world, tracing it through fiction and non-fiction, and in novels, novellas and short stories by canonical authors Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, by the lesser-known writers Catherine Crowe, and Arthur Machen, and in the non-Sherlock Holmes stories of Arthur Conan Doyle. Across this variety of literary forms, these very different authors all engage with the supernatural, with quasi-religious creeds and with pseudo-science.

Each of the three chapters of this thesis is introduced by a section which establishes the historical context and its influence on the texts discussed. Chapter One focuses on the presence of the supernatural and the spirit world in Edward Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni* (1846) and *The Haunted and the Haunters; or, the House and the Brain* (1859), Catherine Crowe's *The Night-Side of Nature* (1848) and Charles Dickens's Christmas stories. Chapter Two explores George Eliot's use of superstition and medieval and Jewish mysticism in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Daniel*

Deronda (1876), before considering Thomas Hardy's Anglo-centric approach to similar issues in *The Return of the Native* (1878) and 'The Withered Arm' (1888). Chapter Three discusses the late nineteenth-century interest in spiritualism, Egyptology, and ancient religion as represented in Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894) and Arthur Conan Doyle's 'The Ring of Thoth' (1890) and 'Lot No. 249' (1894).

Overall, the thesis is concerned with the way in which 'rational' Victorian society is constantly undermined by its engagement with the supernatural: the nineteenth-century desire for empirical evidence of life after death proves, paradoxically, Victorian irrationality.

In memory of
Alexandra Smith
(1978 – 2009)

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Introduction

The issue of spiritual life after death lies at the very heart of Victorian society. For the ever-rationalising Victorians, any hint of uncertainty proved troubling: the drive to explain, categorise and understand a rapidly changing world led to unparalleled advances in science, technology and communication. But scientific understanding could only make minimal contributions to the Victorian fascination with eternal life. The very nature of orthodox Christian doctrine rejected the necessity to provide empirical and clear-cut evidence for the post-death survival of the human soul: faith, not proof, was central.¹ But religious belief was shaken by the scientific achievements of the age, most notably by the discoveries of Darwin and his theories of evolution which brought religious accounts of creation into question and so undermined orthodox Christian beliefs.

In this thesis, I position these mid-Victorian theories of evolution as a pivotal point, analysing the effects of science and technology on religious belief in a post-Darwinian world. More specifically, my focus is on the problematic issue and representation of life after death in Victorian literature. Works by classic realist authors such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy are, surprisingly, frequently haunted in various ways by the restless spirits of the dead, and the intention of this thesis is to consider the implications of this disturbing presence in fiction that claimed to represent the lived reality of its readers.²

¹ Christianity in mid-Victorian Britain is distinctly plural: there were many competing forms of Christianity, ranging from the Church of England, the Broad Church, Non-conformists and the Evangelicals to Roman Catholicism. In this thesis, I am going to be focusing on orthodox Church of England doctrine. For further information on the various aspects of Christianity, see, for example, Owen Chadwick's *The Victorian Church* (London: Black, 1966), II.

² Throughout this thesis I will be referring to 'realist' works as those that attempt to represent the lived reality of readers. Although I will not be discussing realist works or realism in any detail, for further

David Pike's fascinating research into the contemporary response to the 1866 penny-dreadful serial, *The Wild Boys of London; or, the Children of the Night*, which centred upon a group of boys living underground in the London sewers, in part inspired the direction of my research.³ What proved shocking to the Victorian public was not merely the depiction of the filthy living conditions of these impoverished children, but their concealed proximity to 'polite' society: the notion of something undesirable lurking beneath the surface was simultaneously repelling, threatening and yet fascinating. While the public response to the publication of the fictional 'Children of the Night' is a literal example of Victorian anxieties about what might lie unseen beneath the surface of 'polite' society, what is interesting is that it also seemed to parallel the unease towards the 'other' world of the spirit which haunted Victorian society, usually figured as superstition, the supernatural or religion, which offered the possibility of eternal life. This is, of course, paradoxical and in conflict with Victorian rationality. Victorian Britain strove to be a nation defined by science, technology and the rational, evident in events such as the 1851 Great Exhibition, the contemporary research into evolution, and geological discoveries and the consequent controversial challenges to theology and biblical accuracy. Simultaneously, however, the Victorian period saw the development of quasi-religious occult movements, including freemasonry, spiritualism and theosophy.

The Victorian spiritualist movement has been the focus of much critical research. For example, Janet Oppenheim's *The Other World: Spiritualism and*

information, see, for example, Dennis Walder's 'The Genre Approach' in *The Realist Novel*, ed. Dennis Walder (London: Routledge, 1995), 3-30 and Ian Watt's 'Realism and the Novel Form' in *The Realist Novel*, ed. Dennis Walder (London: Routledge, 1995), 214-223.

³ David Pike, *Subterranean Cities: The World Beneath Paris and London, 1800-1945* (New York and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), pp. 206-11. While clearly fiction, *The Wild Boys of London* may in part have been based on real examples.

Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914 (1988) and Alison Winter's *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (2000) both explore the issue of pseudo-science from a predominantly historical perspective, while Alex Owen's *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late-Victorian England* (2004) takes a similar approach but applies a feminist methodology. By contrast, this thesis traces the relationship between orthodox Christianity, belief in the supernatural and quasi-religious movements in both a pre- and post-Darwinian world, reading it in fiction by canonical authors such as Dickens, Eliot and Hardy as well as the marginalised figures of Catherine Crowe and Arthur Machen, and in the lesser known short stories of the popular writer, Arthur Conan Doyle. My choice of texts allows this thesis to develop an argument that is not simply canonical, but rather traces a complex movement across the Victorian period which came full circle as the supernatural gave way to science only for it to be thrown into doubt by *fin-de-siècle* Gothic discourses and the psychoanalytical work of Sigmund Freud.

While I use historical context as the framework for my analysis of specific Victorian works, the emphasis falls on the way in which 'rational' society is constantly undermined by a fascination with the inexplicable issue of the supernatural: the late-Victorian drive towards using empirical evidence to prove the continuation of the human soul after death is paradoxically a product of an ever-present fascination with irrationality. By 'rational' I mean a practical, empirical and reasoned argument which is evidence driven. This differs from my use of the word 'science' which is used to bracket Darwinian theories of evolution, medical advances and scientific exploration. By contrast, 'pseudo-science' covers the Victorian practices of phrenology and mesmerism, while by 'supernatural' I mean ghosts, wizards,

witchcraft and pagan superstitions. Another key term which is used throughout this thesis is 'religion' which refers to orthodox Christian faiths such as the Church of England, Catholicism and their various branches. These terms provide the conceptual framework of my argument and are used throughout this thesis.

Chapter One focuses on how and why the early-Victorian period (1837-59) fostered an environment in which a discourse of the paranormal, evident in fiction by Edward Bulwer Lytton and Catherine Crowe, was made possible. These are writers whose unconventional interest and belief in the supernatural world of spirits infected and inflected their fiction. Bulwer Lytton and Crowe's exploration of natural forces which appear supernatural incorporated contemporary scientific discoveries as well as the authors' own spiritual beliefs. The final section, in contrast, considers Charles Dickens's popular Christmas stories, in which he deliberately manipulates supernatural discourses in which he had no belief in order to amuse rather than inform. While his personal fascination with quasi-scientific concepts such as mesmerism and apparent spontaneous combustion undoubtedly shapes his social realism, for Dickens, the paranormal elements of his fiction are purely for the entertainment of his readers. While I might have chosen the work of, for example, Wilkie Collins rather than Dickens, it is specifically Dickens's friendship with Bulwer Lytton and fraught relationship with the controversial Crowe which connects these three very different authors; their life stories and mutual interest in pseudo-sciences connect Bulwer Lytton, Crowe and Dickens in surprising ways.

The major shift in attitudes towards orthodox Church of England doctrine was strongly influenced not only by the publication of Charles Darwin's 1859 research

into evolution by natural selection, but also by the equally contentious *Essays and Reviews* (1860), comprising papers written by clerics and clergy and which openly challenged biblical accuracy. This seeming attack on the very foundations of the Church of England faith contributed to the increasing secularization of mid-Victorian society and incited individuals to seek for alternative modes of spiritual succour and belief. The extended 'context' section of Chapter Two thus positions Darwin and biblical debates as catalysts for a change in attitude towards the Established Church, paving the way for quasi-religious elements to intrude into mid-Victorian society.

In this context, the chapter considers the work of the agnostic George Eliot, an author whose knowledge about theology, science and esoteric eastern creeds is evident in her fiction but, significantly, is not a substitute for her own lost Christian faith. Rather, I suggest that she deliberately utilises religious discourses in order to evoke specific meanings in her texts and to articulate that which was, discursively speaking, otherwise unspeakable. Indeed, a vast amount of critical research focuses on Eliot's contentious relationship with religion and its representation in her works; Alessandra Grego's chapter in *Myths of Europe* (2007) explores Eliot's scriptural typography in addition to a number of articles in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot* (2001), focused on Eliot's lack of faith, which arguably led to her scientific investigations. Nonetheless, although critics have explored the Christian and non-Christian nuances which shape Eliot's works, this thesis, by contrast, argues that Eliot's preoccupation with ancient creeds acts as a discourse in which to raise 'unspeakable' issues which cannot be openly addressed in the Victorian realist novel. In *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), references to medieval religious hysteria, I suggest, metaphorically represent repressed sexual desire, while *Daniel Deronda's* (1876)

preoccupation with ancient Jewish mysticism signals Eliot's anthropological fascination with religions rather than acting as a potential replacement for her eroded Christian faith. Indeed, it is Eliot's position as an investigator of religion as well as her relationship with the scientific investigator, G. H. Lewes, which necessitates her presence in this thesis: the texts selected offer subtle references to unorthodox and esoteric religious beliefs, superstition and medieval mysticism, references which are less obvious in her other, earlier realist works such as *Middlemarch* (1871-72) – which focuses on issues such as class and education – and the social novel, *Felix Holt* (1866).

Chapter Two then moves on to consider another canonical mid-Victorian author and agnostic, Thomas Hardy, whose open rejection of Church of England doctrine is more obvious in his fiction. Moreover, his preoccupation with nature, the implicitly pagan superstitions of Dorset and life after death suggests a pantheistic credo which makes it an essential part of my analysis. The pre-Christian witchcraft imagery which shapes the portrayal of *The Return of the Native's* (1878) protagonist, Eustacia Vye, emphasises, as in *The Mill on the Floss*, unconventional femininity: by contrast to Eliot's work. However, Hardy uses this witchcraft motif to look backwards, away from Christianity towards the pantheistic paganism of an ancient British civilisation, a perspective also seen in 'The Withered Arm' (1888). While many of Hardy's novels or short stories trace ancient Dorset culture in some way – the rural superstitions evident, for example, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Far From the Madding Crowd* – Eustacia Vye and Rhoda Brooke are Hardy's most obvious witch-like characters: the discourse of witchcraft is intrinsically connected to the complex portrayal of these unconventional women.

A popular mid- to late-Victorian author, there has, inevitably, been a great deal of critical work on Thomas Hardy. His contentious agnosticism, fascination with ancient Dorset folklore and his appreciation of the natural world are discussed at length in works such as Timothy Hands' *Thomas Hardy: Distracted Preacher? Hardy's Religious Biography and its Influence on his Novels* (1989), Ruth Firor's *Folkways in Thomas Hardy* (1998) and, most recently, a number of essays in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy* (2009).⁴ Yet, while existing work on Thomas Hardy covers almost every aspect of his biography and of his fiction, my thesis positions a major novel alongside an under-researched short story, drawing parallels between the two and arguing that Hardy's own connections with pre-Christianity (displayed by his profound interest in archaeology), witchcraft and rural paganism are used specifically as vehicles to express unconventional femininity, even in these two very different genres. By contrast to Eliot, however, Hardy's intimacy with the pagan superstitions of ancient Dorset suggest that they go some way in replacing his lost faith. Even with the most unlikely of authors, spiritual life after death insidiously but insistently disrupts Hardy's fictional worlds.

The emphasis which Hardy placed on an ancient British civilisation and its religions is again a key theme in Chapter Three and ultimately governed my choice of texts. The fiction I consider here is non-canonical and non-realist; while Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories were hugely popular and very influential, his myriad other short stories are less well known and have attracted less academic interest. The writing of Arthur Machen is virtually unknown to the wider public, although it has recently attracted critical attention, but both Conan Doyle and Machen were clearly

⁴ Dennis Taylor, George Levine and Phillip Mallet are just a few of the contributors whose essays will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two of this thesis.

fascinated by the occult, paganism and Egyptology.⁵ A further connection is that Conan Doyle and Machen were both practitioners of quasi-religious occult practices; Machen was inducted into the esoteric secret society the Order of the Golden Dawn, while Conan Doyle was a devout believer in spiritualism. Conan Doyle knew and admired Machen's supernatural tales and the two writers' Celtic origins – Machen's Welsh upbringing and Conan Doyle's Scottish-based childhood and Irish heritage – connect these two very different literary figures and are evident in their fiction. In Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894) and in several of Conan Doyle's short stories, a focus on superstition, the supernatural ancient Egyptian rituals and old religions are invoked and explored. Moreover, Machen's affiliation with the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn gave him an intimate awareness of the structure and practice of late-Victorian secret societies, while Conan Doyle's unwavering support for spiritualism positions this quasi-religion as a real substitute for his lost Catholic faith: the spirit world became real for Conan Doyle, but in the two short stories discussed in this thesis he displaces this belief to ancient Egypt. By the end of Chapter Three it should be apparent that, although Machen and Conan Doyle both write stories that are, ultimately, fiction, their use of non-Christian beliefs to create horror suggest that interfering with the mysteries of ancient religions will not necessarily end well: significantly, the paganism which Hardy so freely explored is upheld as a negative influence.

⁵ Tartarus Press published new editions of Machen's works in 2007 while a new edition of Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* was released in July 2010 by Rough Draft Printing. Additionally, a number of academic works focus on his life and literature. For example, Jack G. Voller's 'Arthur Machen' in *Gothic Writers: A Critical and Bibliographical Guide*, eds. Douglass H. Thomson, Jack G. Voller, Frederick S. Frank (Westport: Greenwood, 2002), pp. 278-82; Paul Fox's 'Eureka in Yellow: The Art of Detection in Arthur Machen's Keynote Mysteries', *Clues: A Journal of Detection*, n.s. 25:1 (Fall 2006), pp. 58-69; Sage Leslie-McCarthy's 'Chance Encounters: The Detective as 'Expert'', Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan* *Australasian Journal of Victorian Studies*, n.s. 13:1, 2008, pp. 35-45.

A thesis which covers such a long time period will, of course, leave certain gaps. I am aware of the problems involved in selecting the texts for discussion but I was concerned with fiction which seemed, on the surface, to have no elements of religion or the supernatural. Instead of focussing on late-Victorian Gothic works such as Richard Marsh's *The Beetle* or Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, I wanted to explore fiction which seemed subtly to complicate the issues of spiritual life after death and supernatural haunting.⁶ The question of 'what lies beneath' and the various ways in which writers use it is central, responding to the moment in which each text was produced. I particularly wanted to focus upon the marginalised works of Machen and Conan Doyle, contrasting them to the realist fiction of canonical authors, and to explore their Celtic connections. Conan Doyle and Machen's work demonstrates how *fin-de-siècle* society had moved away from the early-Victorian attempts to reconcile science, superstition and orthodox Christianity towards new modes of belief focused on the individual. Finally, the nineteenth-century explorations of pseudo-sciences, archaeology and ancient quasi-religions which, in a post-Darwinian world, might be considered as attempts to find a replacement for a faith undermined by scientific discovery, seem to turn inwards into a focus on the individual, leading, inexorably it seems, towards the early-twentieth-century psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud and his new emphasis on what lies beneath the human psyche.

⁶ Marsh's *The Beetle* and Stoker's *Dracula* have been the focus of much critical attention. For example, William Hughes, *Beyond Dracula: Bram Stoker's Fiction and its Cultural Context* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000); *Empire and the Gothic: Politics of Genre*, ed. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003); Valdine Clemens's *The Return of the Repressed: Gothic Horror from 'The Castle of Otranto' to Alien* (Albany : State University of New York Press, 1999); Victoria Margee, 'Both in Men's Clothing': Gender, Sovereignty and Insecurity in Richard Marsh's *The Beetle*, *Critical Survey*, n.s. 19:2, (2007), pp. 63-81; Julian Wolfreys, 'The Hieroglyphic Other' in *A Mighty Mass of Brick and Smoke: Victorian and Edwardian Representations of London*, ed. Lawrence Phillips (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 169-92; Kelly Hurley, "'The Inner Chambers of all Nameless Sin': *The Beetle*, Gothic Female Sexuality, and Oriental Barbarism' in *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature*, ed. Lloyd Davis (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 193-213.

The issue of ‘what lies beneath’ is firmly traced across works by various authors and in various literary forms. Chapter One places Bulwer Lytton’s occult novel and short story alongside Crowe’s factual collection of ‘real’ pseudo-scientific stories to suggest that there are many different modes of expressing belief in inexplicable supernatural occurrences.. My section on Dickens argues that it is only in his Christmas stories that this traditionally realist author is comfortable exploring the issue of supernatural haunting. Ultimately, this research into Dickens directed my research towards other canonical authors and the novel genre. Mid-Victorian realist works by Eliot and Hardy shape Chapter Two, suggesting that in a post-Darwinian world, many authors depicted a superficially ‘real’ view of the world through the novel form. Yet, even in these classically realist novels, nuances of an alternative discourse insidiously but insistently shape the narrative. With this chapter, moreover, I specifically chose to conclude with Hardy’s short horror story, suggesting that, as in the Christmas stories of Dickens, this genre allows for an exploration of unsettling issues such as witchcraft, paganism and ancient religions. Hardy’s presentation of ancient Dorset superstitions develops into the analysis of the *fin de siècle* short story work of Conan Doyle and Machen, who again use this form in their exploration of esoteric beliefs. The similarities between these very different genres, literary forms and authors all foreground the unsettling issue that the supernatural, quasi-religious creeds and pseudo-science shape very different modes of expression in surprisingly similar ways.

Chapter One (1837 – 59): Context, Meaning, Texts

I - Context

Queen Victoria's 1837 coronation presented a new British monarch to the public and represented the beginning of an era that was to be characterised by progress, change and reform. In particular, the 1832 First Reform Act had already challenged aristocratic privileges in Parliament. After two unsuccessful Reform Bills sparked public rioting, a third Bill was finally passed by the House of Lords on 4 June 1832. This widened the enfranchisement of male householders and signalled what the historian Llewellyn Woodward deemed to be 'a turning point in modern English history'.¹ Although this controversial law only fractionally expanded the franchise,² it nevertheless went some way to rectify the electoral under-representation of new manufacturing towns in Parliament and simultaneously satisfied public demand.³ But what is perhaps more significant than the consequences of this Act was Britain's ability to avoid serious uprisings in the tense months prior to its enactment. After witnessing the French 'July Revolution' of 1830 – in which King Charles X was overthrown by his cousin Louis-Philippe – all parties in the British government were concerned that this rebellion might spread across the Channel.⁴ However, Britain's ability to avoid internal strife and to advance political reform provided a much needed sense of stability; it allowed the country to concentrate on more productive issues, most importantly developments in the fields of science and technology.

¹ Llewellyn Woodward, *The Age of Reform 1815-1870* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.87.

² In actual fact, the act only added 217,000 voters, all of whom were upper-middle class householders.

³ The complicated issue of the franchise prior to and following the 1832 Reform Act is discussed by Chris Cook in *The Routledge Companion to Britain in the Nineteenth Century 1815-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), p.56.

⁴ Once again it is Woodward who states that '[h]istorians have not ceased to ask how near the country was to revolution during [...] [this] period of confusion'. See Woodward, *Age of Reform*, p.86.

The emergence of Britain as one of the most powerful and innovative industrial nations commenced at the very beginning of the Queen Victoria's reign. In 1839 William Fox Talbot announced a mode of producing photographic prints on silver chloride paper while the subsequent year saw S.F.B. Morse invent the telegraph which revolutionised Victorian communication systems.⁵ More specifically, as historian Chris Cook states, 'the two most important innovations were the development of iron or steel vessels and the replacement of sail by steam power'.⁶ While the first Atlantic crossing occurred in 1838, it was not until 1843 that the engineering talent of Isambard Kingdom Brunel enabled the creation of *SS Great Britain*, a steam-powered ship which reduced the journey to just two weeks.⁷ Improvements in the technology of transport continued, with the first huge expansion of the railways occurring between 1844 and 1846. By 1850 this thoroughly modern transport network connected London with towns across England, Wales and Scotland: travelling around early-Victorian Britain became swifter and more reliable.

Co-existing with such displays of technology, science and logical thinking were the religious sensibilities integral to early-Victorian society. In their work into nineteenth-century spirituality, Suzanne F. Cooper and Paul Atterbury state that:

'[f]or the Victorians, religious belief was a burning issue. Faith determined their choice of school, university and profession [...] in England, Church and State remained closely connected'.⁸

⁵ *The Concise Oxford Chronology of English Literature*, ed. Michael Cox (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.336.

⁶ Cook, *Routledge Companion*, p.213.

⁷ For more information on the achievements of Brunel and the influence of engineering upon the ever growing British Empire see Paul Atterbury, 'Steam and Speed: Industry, Transport and Communications' in *The Victorian Vision*, ed. John. M. Mackenzie (London: V&A Publications, 2001), pp.147-85.

⁸ Suzanne Fagence Cooper and Paul Atterbury, 'Religion and Doubt' in *The Victorian Vision*, ed. John. M. Mackenzie (London: V&A Publications, 2001), pp.125-45.

In a pre-Darwinian world, Christianity continued to affect everyday life with the Church of England positioned as the Established Church.⁹ While Chapter Two of this thesis explores the issue of orthodox Christianity in greater detail, what is important is that belief in God was a large part of everyday life in early-Victorian England. While this period was certainly an era of reform, attitudes towards religion and religious belief remained relatively constant.

But these attitudes towards science and religion were soon to be challenged by various pseudo-sciences which captivated the nation. One of the earliest, and most popular, was mesmerism or animal magnetism.¹⁰ On a basic level, mesmerism was practiced by a mesmerist who made magnetic ‘passes’ – or sweeping motions with the arms – over a patient, placing them in a magnetic stupor. Significantly, after inducing a trance-like state the mesmerist was thought to have complete control over the body, actions and thoughts of the mesmerised subject: in effect, therefore, the subject was no more than a puppet that could be controlled by the mesmerist. Placed in context, this early-nineteenth century pseudo-science was considered to parallel Michael Faraday’s investigations into electricity; the magnetic connection between the body of the mesmerist and his subject was perceived to replicate an electric charge. Indeed, mesmerism was a practice which was widely advocated and practiced throughout the

⁹ It is relevant to note that I am going to limit my research to the various denominations of Christianity within England. I am aware that the complex theme of religion was a topical issue throughout the rest of Great Britain but I am going to focus predominantly on the Church of England and Catholicism. Moreover, the issue of religion will be discussed in greater detail in chapter two of this thesis.

¹⁰ Horace Smith’s *Love and Mesmerism* (London: Henry Colburn, 1845) explores the Victorian passion of ‘Mesmeric wonders’ (p.iv) from a contemporary viewpoint. Moreover, for a general history on mesmerism see, Vincent Buranelli, *The Wizard From Vienna* (London: The Scientific Book Club, 1977). The issue of mesmerism and the Victorians is perhaps best explored in Alison Winter’s *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998). This work takes a detailed look at mesmerism with regard to the medical profession, the Church of England and the general population of Victorian Britain. Winter takes Harriet Martineau, Elizabeth Barrett and Ada Lovelace as case studies in her chapter entitled ‘Emanations from the Sickroom’, looking at their belief in and use of the practice. This critic argues that during the early 1830s mesmerism was transformed from a practice associated with Regency quackeries into a credible science.

medical community; respectable physicians such as John Elliotson, Thomas Wakely and W. B. Carpenter were pioneers of the practice, using it as a form of anaesthetic so that operations and medical procedures could be performed on the mesmerised patient.¹¹ Ultimately, however, the enthusiasm surrounding mesmerism was swiftly extinguished after the notorious O'Key sisters, whom John Elliotson claimed to have successfully mesmerised, were exposed as frauds in the summer of 1838.¹² Despite initially attracting supporters such as Dickens and George Cruikshank, mesmerism fell out of favour only to be replaced by the new and even more captivating pseudo-science of spiritualism.

Building upon the early-Victorian vogue for pseudo-sciences, the spiritualist movement swept through America before reaching England in the early 1850s when, as George K. Nelson notes, 'Mr. Stone, an American lecturer on animal magnetism, brought the medium Mrs. Hayden' to London, arousing immediate interest.¹³ Essentially, spiritualism is the practice of channelling the psychic powers of a medium in order to contact restless spirits of the dead, who were believed to exist in

¹¹ See Winter's *Mesmerized* for further information on these specific medical men.

¹² For a more detailed examination of the medical professions relationship with mesmerism (including letters and documents from contemporary doctors, patients and mesmerists) see, *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts, 1830-1890*, eds. Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), pp. 49-63. Furthermore, in relation to Victorian fiction, Maria M. Tartar's *Spellbound: Studies on Mesmerism and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978) takes a psychoanalytical approach to her work, positioning mesmerism alongside Freud's research.

¹³ Geoffrey K. Nelson in *Spiritualism and Society* (London: Routledge, 1969), p. 89. Although I briefly discuss the context of the spiritualist movement in the Edward Bulwer Lytton section of Chapter One of this thesis, Chapter Three explores the late-Victorian vogue for the movement and its position as a form of replacement religion for Christianity. I am not going to analyse the American origins of spiritualism. For further information, however, see, for example, the contemporary work of Henry Spicer, *Sights and Sounds*, Robert S. Cox's *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003) and chapter one of Logie Barrow's *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians 1850-1910* (London and New York: Routledge, 1986).

different spirit spheres.¹⁴ Although early investigators into this new phenomenon included Edward Bulwer Lytton, Catherine Crowe and even Queen Victoria, who witnessed the psychic powers of an American medium called Georgina Eagle in 1846, spiritualism grew in popularity in the early- to mid-Victorian period when *séances* were conducted in private circles throughout all classes of society.¹⁵ Society welcomed the arrival of the spiritualist phenomenon. In 1851 the 'Ghost Club' (aimed at investigating supernatural occurrences) was founded by a group of Cambridge University scholars, while in January 1857 the first spiritualist organisation, 'The Charing Cross Spirit Circle', was inaugurated in London.¹⁶ But during the early-Victorian period, spiritualism was not a religion. Pearsall emphasises how initially 'spiritualism was a parlour pastime, of no more religious significance than mesmerism'.¹⁷ Once the spiritualist movement was established, however, it expanded and developed into an important quasi-religious movement, reaching unexpected levels of popularity throughout Victorian England.

¹⁴ The history of spiritualism is discussed by Nelson in *Spiritualism and Society*. This critic explains how the spiritualist phenomenon swept through America before being brought to England by the Fox sisters and Daniel Douglas Home in 1852. Such people argued that the human personality survived after death and was often accused of mysterious knockings, rappings and spirit writing. The use of a medium was, therefore, essential in order to interpret such forms of communication and gain contact with the spirit of the deceased during a *séance*. Another excellent analysis of the various forms of spiritualism is Ronald Pearsall's *The Table Rappers* (London: Joseph, 1972). More specifically, for a critical analysis of spiritualism and the Victorians see Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago, 1994). Walkowitz dedicates an entire chapter to spiritualism with regard to the Victorian feminist. She explores the case of Georgina Weldon and her struggle against her husband and the medical profession who attempted to categorise her beliefs as a form of insanity. Similarly, Alex Owen in *The Darkened Room: Women, Power and Spiritualism in Late-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) takes a traditionally feminist approach, arguing that spiritualism was a form of female empowerment in a late-Victorian context while Tatiana Kontou's, 'Ventriloquising the Dead: Representations of Victorian Spiritualism and Psychical Research in Selected Nineteenth and late-Twentieth Century Fiction' (Doctoral Thesis, Sussex University, 2006), explores the influence of spiritualism and psychical research on selected female authors.

¹⁵ Marlene Tromp in *Altered States: Sex, Nation, Drugs and Self-Transportation in Victorian Spiritualism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), p. 5 explores the issue of spiritualism's presence in the upper, middle and lower classes.

¹⁶ The spiritualist movement needed a media voice and, as a result, the *Spiritual Telegraph* was first published in April 1855 before a monthly periodical, *Human Nature*, became the mouthpiece of progressive spiritualism throughout the Victorian period following its establishment in 1867.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 29.

Arguably the most famous medium was the Scottish-born Daniel Dunglas Home (1833-86). As Ruth Brandon observes, Home performed ‘astonishing feats. He floated in the air, he elongated his body, he raised heavy tables without touching them [...] and he was never exposed in fraud’.¹⁸ Home himself advertised his untarnished reputation stating that ‘[my] opponents have not succeeded in producing one word of evidence to discredit the truth of my statements’¹⁹ while his second wife further upheld Home’s abhorrence of fraud, claiming that ‘he made publicly known his intention of exposing the impostures that usurped the name of Spiritualism’.²⁰ Regardless of whether Home was fraudulent or not, the fact remains that he attracted a variety of rich and powerful supporters, from Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806-61) – whose sceptical husband, Robert Browning (1812-89), composed a satirical poem, ‘Mr. Sludge the Medium’ (1864), based on Home – to Edward Bulwer Lytton and, at the close of the nineteenth century, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) as well as patrons such as Napoleon III (1808-73) and Tsar Alexander II (1818-81) who as Peter Lamont notes ‘were unable to provide an alternative explanation for what they saw’.²¹ With this passionate wave of support, nevertheless, came an equally potent backlash: mediums with unblemished reputations such as Home were undoubtedly in the

¹⁸ Brandon, *The Spiritualists*, p. 53. Chapter One of this thesis explores both the biography of Daniel Dunglas Home and his relationship with Edward Bulwer Lytton.

¹⁹ Home, *Incidents* (1872), p. vii.

²⁰ Mme. Home, *His Life and Mission*, p. 391.

²¹ Peter Lamont, ‘Spiritualism and a Mid-Victorian Crisis of Evidence’, *History Journal*, n.s. 47:4 (2004), pp. 897-920 (p. 899). Lamont further notes that other famous supporters of Home included John Ruskin, Robert Owen, Robert Chambers, Florence Marryat – daughter of the acclaimed children’s author captain Frederick Marryat (1792-1848) – and W. T. Stead who, as Roger Luckhurst in ‘W. T. Stead’s Occult Economies’ in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, eds. Louise Henson, Geoffrey Cantor, Gowan Dawson, Richard Noakes, Sally Shuttleworth, Jonathan R. Topham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 125-35, notes, was so passionate about spiritualism, he ‘announced that his new journal *Borderland* would be devoted to “the study of phenomena which lie on the borderland which Science has hitherto, for the most part, contemptuously relegated to Superstition”’ (p. 127).

minority. More often, mediums were exposed as fraudulent tricksters by vigilant anti-spiritualist investigators.

The spiritualist movement was fascinating to contemporary society because, as Jenny Hazelgrove explains, it appeared simultaneously 'fraudulent and the bearer of some dark, occult knowledge [...] it was both dangerous and desirable'.²² Supporters were attracted to its claim of providing evidence for spiritual life after death which the age craved but which science repeatedly questioned. Yet, as Oppenheim observes, 'a number of mediums were actors, consciously playing roles, purposely deceiving their audience, and giving public performances worthy of any trained thespian'.²³ Pearsall also notes the elaborate lengths to which many mediums would go in order to satisfy public desire for table rapping, furniture moving, levitation of both the medium and inanimate objects, musical instruments playing by themselves, unexplained lights, spirit hands and even full spirit materialisation.²⁴ But not all were convinced. In addition to Charles Dickens's prolonged anti-spiritualist campaign in the pages of his periodicals, *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*,²⁵ the nineteenth-century investigator of spiritualism, Frank Podmore, observes that, following Dickens's successful exposure of the fraudulent medium Mrs. Hayden, '*Blackwood's Magazine*, the *National Miscellany* and other papers took a similar line; whilst G. H. Lewes, in the *Leader*, [also] showed [...] the trick'.²⁶ No paper took more delight in mocking the spiritualist movement than *Punch* which, on one occasion, sarcastically asked would it 'not be advisable to turn all living Bishops out of the House of Lords, and to supply their places with the spirits of their predecessors [...] so as to provide [...]

²² Hazelgrove, *Spiritualism and Society*, p. 2.

²³ Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 7.

²⁴ See Pearsall, *Table Rappers* for a full account of the common techniques used in cases of spiritualist fraud.

²⁵ Chapter One of this thesis details Charles Dickens's anti-spiritualist campaign in detail.

²⁶ Podmore, *Mediums of the Nineteenth Century*, II, p. 5.

genuine Lords Spiritual?’²⁷ *Punch* later sneered at Daniel Dunglas Home’s claims that spirits enabled him to elongate his body, declaring that ‘Mr. Home stretched a good deal in his autobiography; but few will credit him with the capacity of stretching like a piece of India-rubber’²⁸ while *John Bull* blamed cases of marital infidelity on ‘the pretended “manifestations”’ of spiritualism.²⁹

Yet, although fraud and scepticism were threatening to undermine the movement, its supporters looked towards religion for answers and reassurance: as spiritualism grew in popularity it moved further away from its initial reputation as a pseudo-science towards a position which arguably upheld spiritualism as a quasi-religious faith led by mediums such as Home and Mrs. Hayden. Chapter One of this thesis, therefore, suggests that it is this blend of pseudo-science and religion which informs Edward Bulwer Lytton’s 1842 occult novel *Zanoni*. Catherine Crowe’s collection of ‘factual’ preternatural stories, *Night Side of Nature* (1846) and, perhaps most surprisingly, Charles Dickens’s collection of Christmas stories. Although Dickens manipulates the early-Victorian fascination with spirit worlds and supernatural occurrences for entertainment value, it is significant that the context in which he published his Christmas stories seemed fascinated with the supernatural. More specifically with regard to Bulwer Lytton, spirituality and its representation in

²⁷ Anon., ‘Political Spiritualism’, *Punch*, 23 June 1860, p. 257.

²⁸ Anon., ‘Spiritualism and Stretching’, *Punch*, 1 February 1868, p. 56.

²⁹ Anon., “‘Spiritualism’ and Infidelity”, *John Bull*, 22 September 1855, p. 601. A further cause for doubting spiritualism arose from the late-Victorian trend for ‘spirit photographs’, in which a photograph plate was either double exposed or tampered with prior to the photograph being taken so that a ghostly figure would appear in the image. For further details and examples of staged Victorian spirit photographs see, Harvey’s *Photography and Spirit*. For further information on the Victorian preoccupation with depicting the afterlife in the literature of the period see, for example, Robert Douglas-Fairhurst’s *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) which focuses specifically on the writings of Alfred Lord Tennyson and John Keats.

Zanoni is far from straightforward; it draws attention to issues of science and mysticism to subvert the overt central narrative. Significantly, moreover, Bulwer Lytton's early-Victorian preoccupation with the human spirit and bi-partite soul – the notion that good and bad elements coexist in every human soul – implies a subtle fascination with what lies beneath the self, suggestively pointing towards the early-twentieth century psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud and his new emphasis on what lies beneath the human psyche in the unconscious.

II - Edward Bulwer Lytton

(i)

Born on 25 May 1803, Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer Lytton (1803-73) was everything from a politician and Secretary of State for the Colonies to a best selling novelist and poet.³⁰ While today his works have fallen into obscurity, during his own lifetime he was ranked alongside Charles Dickens as one of the most popular novelists of early-Victorian Britain.³¹ A self-fashioned dandy, Bulwer Lytton's natural eccentricity attracted attention: Leslie Mitchell's extensive research into Bulwer Lytton's life explores this aspect of his personality, noting how 'Lytton refused to live like other men or dress like other men'.³² In the manner of his long-term friend Benjamin Disraeli, Bulwer Lytton mixed parliamentary politics with a distinctly flamboyant lifestyle that went beyond clothing. Indeed, his political career is often overshadowed by his unconventional character and turbulent relations with his estranged wife Rosina.³³ But his influence upon parliamentary reform remains.

³⁰For the first forty years of Bulwer Lytton's life his name was Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer. After the death of his beloved mother, Elizabeth Barbara Lytton, in 1843 he changed his surname by royal licence to Bulwer Lytton (without a hyphen), thus becoming Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer Lytton. In 1866 he was then created Baron Lytton of Knebworth. In this thesis I am going to refer to him as Bulwer Lytton.

³¹Although there is a certain amount of literary criticism concerned with Bulwer Lytton, the majority of this tends to focus upon his more popular and controversial 'Newgate novels'. For example, *Cult Criminals: The Newgate Novels, 1830-1847*, ed. Juliet John (London: Routledge, 1998), Keith Hollingsworth's *The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847: Bulwer, Ainsworth, Dickens, & Thackeray* (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1963) and Heather Worthington's 'Against the Law: Bulwer's Fictions of Crime' in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton: Bicentenary Reflections*, ed. Allan Conrad Christensen (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004), pp. 54-67, all focus on the influence of his popular crime fiction. More specific to my research, C. Nelson Stewart's *Bulwer Lytton as Occultist* (London: Theosophical Publishing, 1927) focuses a great deal on *Zanoni* but this reading tends to be influenced by the author's position as a member of the Theosophical Society. Perhaps the most influential work on Bulwer Lytton is Leslie Mitchell's *Bulwer Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters* (London and New York: Hambledon, 2003).

³² Mitchell, *Bulwer Lytton*, p. 89.

³³ After a disastrous trip to Rome in 1833, Bulwer Lytton and Rosina decided on a separation that ended in a bitter, and often public, battle between the couple. Bulwer Lytton chose to cut his wife's financial support and deny her access to their children, Emily and Robert, and she retaliated by publicly humiliating him in her novels and accusing him of homosexuality with Disraeli. As relations deteriorated further, Rosina even wrote to Prince Albert threatening to throw eggs at the Queen for supporting her husband's work. As a result of Rosina's erratic behaviour, Bulwer Lytton, along with help from John Forster, attempted to have her committed to a lunatic asylum. This aspect of Bulwer

Beginning his political life as a Radical and MP for St. Ives in Huntingdonshire, Bulwer Lytton actively supported the 1832 Reform Act, even though the repercussions of this legislation would later take away his own constituency.³⁴ Even more contentious were his support for abolition of slavery and his concern with Irish affairs. As his friendship with Disraeli, the Tory Prime Minister, deepened, however, so Bulwer Lytton's politics fell into line with the new Tory party Disraeli had created: in 1858 he was asked to take charge of Imperial affairs as Secretary of State for the Colonies. Despite Bulwer Lytton's shifting political loyalties, his position as a prominent MP remained constant. There is a sense that beneath the colourful exterior there was a serious thinker who had the foresight to advocate political reform: it is significant that Bulwer Lytton was popular and politically astute enough to remain in politics for almost his whole adult life.

In contrast to his fluctuating but clearly stated political values, Bulwer Lytton's religious beliefs remain something of a cloudy issue. To all appearances he was a follower of the Church of England: in a diary entry of 1826 he wrote that 'I respect [...] the authority of the Established Church, because I sincerely believe it to be the religious organisation best adapted for the preservation of virtue and happiness among us'.³⁵ Bulwer Lytton, however, was never renowned for his enthusiastic churchgoing and quite openly confessed to curiosity about other faiths. After his mother's death in 1843 and his subsequent nervous breakdown, Bulwer Lytton briefly

Lytton's biography is well documented and for further information on the topic see Lord Cobbold's 'Rosina Bulwer Lytton: Irish Beauty, Satirist, Tormented Victorian Wife, 1802-1882' in *The Subverting Vision*, pp. 147-58 and Marie Mulvey-Roberts 'Writing for Revenge: The Battle of the Books of Edward and Rosina Bulwer Lytton' in *The Subverting Vision*, pp. 159-73.

³⁴ For more information on Bulwer Lytton's role as a politician see Charles W. Snyder's *Liberty and Morality: A Political Biography of Edward Bulwer-Lytton* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

³⁵ Unpublished diary manuscript quoted by his son, Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, in *The Life, Letters and Literary Remains of Edward Bulwer, Lord Lytton* (London: Kegan Paul, 1883), II. p. 15.

– and notoriously – became an Evangelical in order to try out a new ‘water cure’ treatment imported from Silesia.³⁶ Apart from this momentary deviation, he was, though, fundamentally a member of the Church of England. But his son, Edward Robert Bulwer Lytton, explores the complex issue of Bulwer Lytton’s faith in writing the biography of his famous father:

An unpuritanical Protestantism he regarded as the form of Christian faith most favourable to the maintenance of that sober political freedom on which he set great store. But this did not prevent him from appreciating those features in the character of the Roman Church which justify its Catholic title by the comprehensiveness of its ecclesiastical organisation, and the activity of a popular spirit so profound that in every Catholic country this Church [...] is emphatically the Church of the people.³⁷

In both Bulwer Lytton’s own journal and in his son’s observations on Bulwer Lytton’s religious beliefs there is an absence of any obvious religious devotion: the sedate language lacks fervour and there is an implication that Bulwer Lytton was merely keeping up appearances. His affiliation with the Church of England seems to have been something of a political move: the assumption of a conventional role that would be acceptable to early-Victorian society. Nevertheless, on one issue he was clear and passionate. Bulwer Lytton’s enthusiastic belief in the immortal soul was firmly rooted in his psyche. Once more his son draws attention to the issue: ‘his belief in the existence of a personal provident Deity, and a responsible indestructible human soul, was inherent to the constitution of his mind, and inseparable from the sense of his own vigorous personality’.³⁸ It is perhaps his insistence on an eternal soul that led Bulwer Lytton towards the supernatural; beneath his rational surface, curiosity attracted him to metaphysics and spiritualism. In his exploration into Bulwer Lytton’s spirituality, Mitchell states that ‘[h]e was a man who held conversations with ghosts.

³⁶ Mitchell, *Bulwer Lytton*, p. 92.

³⁷ Lytton, *Life and Letters*, p. 18.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 17.

His books are full of astrologers, dealers in the Kabbala, and alchemy. He was a client of mediums'.³⁹ Time and again, Bulwer Lytton's concern with the status of the human soul is intertwined with religious mysticism and spiritualism. Moreover, it is this fraught relationship that is often reflected in his novels and, more specifically with regard to this thesis, is a central theme running throughout *Zanoni*.

Originally published as *Zicci* in 1838, during Bulwer Lytton's short time as co-editor of the *Monthly Chronicle*, the work was then completely reworked, renamed *Zanoni* and serialised monthly in *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* in 1842. Classified as occult fiction with other Bulwer Lytton novels such as *Godolphin* (1833), *Rienzi* (1835) and *A Strange Story* (1861-2), *Zanoni* is a text with many layers.⁴⁰ Predominantly a love story, the plot follows the relationship between the beautiful opera singer, Viola Pisani, and the mysterious stranger Zanoni. Viola's English suitor Glyndon, however, is attracted to the mystical powers that Zanoni

³⁹ Mitchell, *Bulwer Lytton*, p. 131. The Victorian artist, William Powell Frith, also focuses on the Bulwer family connection with ghosts in his work *My Autobiography and Reminiscences* (London: Bentley and Son, 1887), II. He recounts that '[a]t Knebworth, the seat of Lord Lytton, there is a bedchamber called the "Yellow Boy's Room". The story goes that Lord Castlereagh [...] was, on one occasion, the guest of the late Lord Lytton's father. Without any warning he was consigned, for the night, to the "Yellow Boy's Room". On the following morning Lord Castlereagh told Mr. Bulwer that he had been disturbed in the night in a very startling and unpleasant fashion. "I was very tired", said my Lord "and was soon asleep. [...] what awoke me I know not. I looked in the direction of the fire and saw [...] the figure of a boy with long yellowish hair. As I looked [...] he drew his fingers two or three times across his throat. I saw him [...] as distinctly as I see you now." Mr. Bulwer did *not* tell Lord Castlereagh that the "Yellow Boy" always appeared to anyone who was destined to die a violent death' pp. 309-10. The significance of this event was that Castlereagh cut his own throat on 12 August 1822.

⁴⁰ Although Edward Bulwer Lytton produced many examples of occult fiction, I am going to limit my research to *Zanoni*. Mitchell's *Bulwer Lytton* devotes a chapter to a more general reading of the various wizards, astrologers and mesmerists that appear in other occult novels while Allan Conrad Christensen's *Edward Bulwer Lytton: The Fiction of New Regions* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1976) devotes a chapter to German influences on Bulwer Lytton's supernatural novels. More specifically with regard to literary criticism on *Zanoni* and the occult, Lawrence Poston's 'Beyond the Occult: the Gowdian Nexus of Bulwer's *Zanoni*', *Studies in Romanticism*, n.s. 37:2 (Summer 1998), pp. 131-61 argues that *Zanoni* draws upon and goes beyond traditional Gothic motifs, suggesting that the text is a reworking of themes found in the post-Jacobin reformism of William Godwin and others in the Shelley circle. Again, Nelson C. Stewart's work *Lytton as Occultist* focuses more on the biographical aspects to suggest that author himself was 'indubitably a born occultist' (p. 18). My research, however, is going to move beyond a straightforward reading of *Zanoni* as an occult text, arguing that a less obvious but equally important religious framework shapes the language and narrative structure.

displays and eventually convinces Zanoni to let him become a disciple of Mejnour – the only other surviving member of an ancient religious sect – so that he may learn the secrets of the spirit world and gain immortality. Headstrong and impatient, Glyndon refuses to obey the dictates of Mejnour and enters a secret chamber to taste the magical elixir of life. Through this action he inadvertently conjures up the demonic Dweller of the Threshold, who haunts and torments the broken Glyndon for the rest of the narrative. Meanwhile, Viola marries Zanoni, who loses much of his power as a result of the union. Believing her husband to be involved with black witchcraft Viola takes their child and flees to France only to become entangled with the French Revolution and subsequently imprisoned. Zanoni eventually finds his wife, convinces her of his innocence and sacrifices his own supernaturally-generated immortality by taking Viola's place on the guillotine.

With the French Revolution of 1789-99 acting as a back-drop for the narrative, this element of realism is placed side by side with Rosicrucian science, magical potions and evil spirits. It is perhaps this mixture of the supernatural, religion and realism that reduced the text's appeal to the early-Victorian audience, with Bulwer Lytton confiding in his friend John Forster that '[i]t shoots too much over the heads of people to hit the popular taste'⁴¹ before predicting that the book would be 'no favourite with the largest of all asses – the English Public'.⁴² Even Mary Elizabeth Braddon – a fervent admirer of Bulwer Lytton – found fault with the text when comparing it with his later novel, *A Strange Story*, stating that '[i]n *Zanoni* [...] there

⁴¹ Victor Alexander George Robert Bulwer Lytton, *The Life of Edward Bulwer Lytton* (London: Macmillan, 1913), II. p. 34.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 35.

is more pathos but less power'.⁴³ She did not, however, completely condemn the work and believed that 'Viola is poetry itself, and her love for the mystic sage is the sweetest, purest passion that ever poet imagined. In *Zanoni* we have Lord Lytton, as a poet, at his best'.⁴⁴ Similarly, a critic in *The Times* hailed the work as having 'the best and noblest principles, whether political, moral or religious. Viola, the heroine, is an impersonation of all that is lovely, and made for love'.⁴⁵ Regardless of the critical focus on *Zanoni*'s powerful depiction of romance, the narrative is overtly concerned with the supernatural and, in particular, the immersion of the eponymous protagonist in a world of occult mystery.⁴⁶

(ii)

Throughout *Zanoni*, the emphasis on magic remains clear. Even before the main narrative begins the introduction confronts the reader with the notion of secret societies and pseudo-science: the narrator is in an old book-shop where 'the curious might discover the most notable collection, ever amassed by an enthusiast of the works of Alchemist, Cabalist, and Astrologer'.⁴⁷ Immediately these powerful themes are foregrounded while it is significant that in this obscure book shop the narrator encounters an old gentleman – who is later revealed to be Glyndon – and converses

⁴³ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, 'Lord Lytton', *Belgravia*, n.s. 20 (1873), pp. 73-88 (p. 81). For a more detailed account of the critical reaction to *Zanoni* see Robert Lee Wolff's work entitled *Strange Stories and Other Explorations in Victorian Fiction* (Boston: Gambit, 1971). In this work, Wolff dedicates an entire chapter to the reaction of the *Athenaeum*, *Literary Gazette*, the *Examiner* and Bulwer Lytton's personal friend John Foster to *Zanoni*.

⁴⁴ Braddon, *Belgravia*, p. 81.

⁴⁵ Anon., *The Times*, 12 March 1842, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Bulwer Lytton's connection with the supernatural, and its connection with *Zanoni*, is complex. In *Incidents in My Life* (London: Longman, 1863), the medium Daniel Dunglas Home hints at a connection between Bulwer Lytton's personal fascination with spiritualism and his occult novel, stating that '[w]hilst I was at Ealing, a distinguished novelist [...] attended a *séance*, at which some very remarkable manifestations occurred, and which were chiefly directed to him. [...] The rappings on the table suddenly became unusually firm and loud. He asked "what spirit is present?" the alphabet was called over, and the response was "I am the spirit who influenced you to write Z—!"' (p. 65).

⁴⁷ Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Zanoni* (New York: Steinerbooks, 1971), p. 11. All further references to *Zanoni* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis.

with him about 'Rosicrucian mysteries' (p. 12). Initially the narrator believes Glyndon's ideas on magic and secret religious sects to be founded on myth, stating that '[t]his is the age of facts – the age of facts, Sir' (p. 12). Nevertheless, it seems that in spite of reason he is intrigued by Glyndon's knowledge on the subject as the 'mystical language of the old gentleman crept through [...] [his] disordered imagination' (p. 18), fascinating him to such an extent that he spends the next seven years deciphering Glyndon's manuscript in order to understand Rosicrucian theories and produce *Zanoni*.⁴⁸ What I want to foreground in Bulwer Lytton's complex introduction is the conflict between rational thought and occult mystery. The same discrepancy of ideas dominated Bulwer Lytton's own life: outwardly a Member of Parliament, he was often discredited in the public eye by his affiliation with spiritual sects and fringe Freemasonry. This aspect of Bulwer Lytton's biography has attracted a great deal of attention, with critics such as Robert Lee Wolff declaring that '*Zanoni* is often – though inaccurately – called a "Rosicrucian novel"'.⁴⁹ Despite Wolff's dismissal of the Rosicrucian nature of the text, he has a different view of the novelist, stating that while '[w]e are beginning to see how little *Zanoni* is a Rosicrucian novel [...] [i]ts purported author [...] and its real author, Bulwer himself, were both Rosicrucians'.⁵⁰ This claim is supported by Bulwer Lytton's grandson who agrees that

⁴⁸ The history of the Rosicrucians is discussed by Jess Nevins in *The Encyclopedia of Fantastic Victoriana* (Austin: Monkeybrain, 2005), pp. 759-60 and Wolff in *Strange Stories*, pp. 163-65. The Rosicrucians first appear in history in 1614 and 1615 in Germany with the publication of scientific writings that displayed characteristic esoteric beliefs that combined mysticism, alchemy and the sciences. The most important treatise was called 'A Report on the Fraternity' (*Fama Fraternitatis*) which launched the Rosicrucian myth and told of Christian Rosenkreutz who made a pilgrimage in the late 1300s to Palestine, studied the wisdom and secret magic of the 'Sages of Damcar' and acquired the knowledge of man's relationship to the universe. He returned to Germany to form a Christian brotherhood whose members took a vow of chastity, used miraculous cures and travelled throughout the world adopting the dress and custom of the local people before choosing a disciple to continue his work after death. During the eighteenth century various European groups claimed possession of Rosicrucian secrets while the two most important Rosicrucian societies were founded in the nineteenth century and were named the *Societas Rosicruciana* (founded 1865) and the Order of the Golden Dawn (founded 1888).

⁴⁹ Wolff, *Strange Stories*, p. 163.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 185.

his literary ancestor was 'himself a member of the Society of Rosicrucians and Grand Patron of the Order'⁵¹, observing that '[a]s this was a secret society, it is not surprising that among Bulwer's papers there should be no documents which throw any light on his connections'.⁵² While the very nature of a clandestine brotherhood intentionally obscures the identity of its members, Bulwer Lytton's association with the Rosicrucians remains strong. What is perhaps even more interesting is his relationship with another underground society: that of Freemasonry.⁵³

As with the vast majority of events in Bulwer Lytton's life, his brush with Freemasonry was not conventional. Unlike his father, General William Earle Bulwer, who was Provincial Grand Master for Norfolk from 1801-1807, and his brother, Sir Henry Bulwer, who was initiated into a Cambridge lodge in 1822, Bulwer Lytton's interest in Freemasonry was never mainstream. In an undated and obscure Masonic periodical, Henry R. Evans contrasts Bulwer Lytton's Masonic activities with his position as 'an ardent student of occultism and spiritualistic phenomena';⁵⁴ something that was not commonly associated with the Order. Nevertheless, Evans remains confident that the Victorian novelist was undoubtedly connected to the Brotherhood, stating that 'Lord Bulwer-Lytton was a member of the Masonic Fraternity, but I have not been able to establish the date of his initiation nor the lodge of which he was a member'.⁵⁵ In spite of the lack of evidence, Evans even goes as far as to reproduce a Masonic verse which he attributes to Edward Bulwer Lytton, giving it the title

⁵¹ Victor A. G. R. Bulwer Lytton, *The Life*, II. p. 41.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵³ Freemasonry is a secret or tacit Fraternity who share moral and metaphysical ideals which include belief in a supreme being. The Brotherhood is administratively organised into Grand Lodges where members can be initiated. For more detailed information on the subject see Jasper Ridley's *The Freemasons: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society* (London: Constable, 1999).

⁵⁴ Henry R. Evans, 'Lord Bulwer-Lytton – Rosicrucian and Freemason' in *The Master Mason* (Washington: American Masonic Press, undated) pp. 462-66 (p. 464).

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 466.

'Lytton's Masonic Poem'. While the authorship of the poem is uncertain – it is often believed to be composed by Bulwer Lytton's brother, who dedicated a volume of poetry to Edward in 1822 – the fact that Edward Bulwer Lytton was intimately connected with Freemasonry remains.⁵⁶ By contrast, in his work into alternative or 'fringe' Masonry, Ellic Howe takes the opposite view, declaring that '[t]here is no evidence that Lytton was then [1870] or ever had been a member of the craft [...] Lytton's name did not appear as Grand Patron in *The Rosicrucian* until July 1872'.⁵⁷ It seems that, intentionally or not, Bulwer Lytton's relationship with the Order is obscured by doubt, contestation and lack of evidence. However, while the debate surrounding Bulwer Lytton's personal affiliation with Freemasonry continues to cause speculation, what becomes increasingly apparent is his insistence on including occult elements – often associated with unconventional 'fringe' Masonry – in his writings, perhaps most clearly in *Zanoni*.

Zanoni is commonly classified as an early-Victorian occult novel. More specifically, the uncomfortable alliance of realism and the supernatural unsettles the reader and nowhere is this relationship more fraught than in the depiction of the central protagonist Zanoni:

[I]f I told thee that I could initiate thee into the secrets of magic which the philosophy of the whole existing world treats as chimera, or imposture, if I promised to show thee how to command the beings of air and ocean [...] thou wouldst listen to me then. (p. 151)

In response to Glyndon's mixture of fear of and fascination with his powers of prophecy, healing and control over the destiny of others, Zanoni offers to share his

⁵⁶ Wolff, *Strange Stories*, p. 163.

⁵⁷ Ellic Howe, 'Fringe Masonry in England 1870-85', *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, n.s. 85 (1972), pp. 242-95 (p. 261). I would like to acknowledge the help of Diane Clements, Director of London's Library and Museum of Freemasonry for her help and suggestions on the topic of Bulwer Lytton's involvement with Freemasonry.

implicitly preternatural knowledge. What is significant here is the language Zanoni chooses: his words consciously evoke an air of mystery and enchantment as the inexplicable ‘secrets of magic’ (p. 151) seem within the grasp of the power-hungry Glyndon. In suggestively Faustian style, Zanoni appears to offer necromantic power and knowledge on the condition that Glyndon relinquishes all connection with Viola. What becomes even more unsettling, however, is the young Englishman’s behaviour as he takes up Zanoni’s offer of supremacy. Agreeing to all of Zanoni’s demands, Glyndon declares that ‘[a] fiercer desire than that of love burns in my veins – the desire not to resemble but surpass my kind [...] the desire of [...] unearthly power’ (p. 183). Greed and lust for control overwhelm Glyndon as he is consumed by his craving for magical knowledge. The paranormal aspects of Zanoni’s character, which had initially repulsed and unsettled Glyndon, have now seduced him. With such demonstrations of supernaturally inspired power, the occult elements of the narrative are overt.

Zanoni confronts the reader with a world of mysticism, Kabbala and an ancient brotherhood of which Zanoni and Mejnour are the only surviving members. But what remains ambiguous is the source of their strength as the boundaries between human and supernatural blur. For example, after Glyndon flees from Zanoni he climbs to the top of Mount Vesuvius, only to find himself trapped in a volcanic eruption. Zanoni, surrounded by the hellish imagery of burning rock and suffocating sulphuric smoke, emerges from the crater in the form of a ‘Colossal Shadow [...] borrowed from human shape, but immeasurably above the human statue, vague, dark, almost formless; and differing [...] from the limbs and outline of man’ (p. 180). This imagery

links Zanoni to a supernatural spirit or perhaps the Roman God Vulcan⁵⁸: the volcanic eruption almost kills Glyndon while Zanoni remains unscathed by his experience and carries the Englishman to safety. He defies the confinements of the human body to metamorphose into a shape-shifting creature. Such a feat surely requires unearthly powers, so it is perhaps surprising that Zanoni denies using necromancy, attributing his powers instead to an understanding of science and his knowledge of herbalism:

What was the fable of Medea, but a proof of the powers that may be abstracted from the germ and leaf? The most gifted of Priestcrafts, the mysterious sisterhoods of Cuth [...] sought in the meanest herbs what, perhaps, the Babylonian Sages explored in vain amidst the loftiest stars. (p. 87)

Magic and witchcraft are apparently dismissed as Zanoni reiterates the underrated strength of the natural world; his words emphasise the folly of those who search beyond earthly elements for power. By contrast to his seemingly magical knowledge, therefore, Zanoni undermines priestcraft, attributing his eternal youth, gift of prophecy and medical successes to a deep understanding of herbs. This image of herbalism is integral to the text, appearing also as a central theme in the novel's earlier formulation *Zicci* (1838). Significantly, in this underdeveloped initial narrative the main protagonist Zicci 'showed Glyndon a small herb, with a pale blue flower, and then placed it carefully in his bosom'⁵⁹ before telling Glyndon that he is 'a herbalist'.⁶⁰ It seems, then, that Bulwer Lytton wanted to include the powers of the natural world even at this early stage; despite revising and completely transforming various aspects of *Zicci* – such as names and actual plot structure – the stress on

⁵⁸ Vulcan was the Roman god of the forge and the guardian of fire whose smithy lay beneath the crater of Mount Etna in Sicily. Here he crafted the armour of the gods, made a shield for Achilles and crafted Zeus's thunderbolts. For more information see Arthur Cotterell, Rachel Storm, *The Ultimate Encyclopaedia of Mythology* (London: Hermes House, 2004), p. 48 and p. 90.

⁵⁹ Edward Bulwer Lytton, *Lord Lytton's Novels: Falkland and Zicci*, (London: Routledge, 1884), XXIV, p. 132.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 132.

herbalism is transferred to and expanded upon in *Zanoni*.⁶¹ Notably, herbal drugs combine medical, scientific and natural discourses as the power of nature is harnessed and manipulated by herbalist knowledge. Through this emphasis, therefore, *Zanoni* confronts the reader with the rational nature of apparently supernatural events, a dimension of the novel that seems to conflict with the occult elements.

For much of *Zanoni*, the language of magic is used alongside that of science and the margins separating the two categories remain indistinct. This is evident in the fraught relationship between Mejnour and his inexperienced and impulsive disciple Glyndon. Attempting to clarify the role of the ancient Christian Brotherhood to which he belongs, Mejnour simplistically explains that followers aim to decipher the secrets of the 'human frame, to know why the parts ossify and the blood stagnates, and to apply continual preventives to the effects of Time. This is not Magic; it is the Art of Medicine' (p. 242). Once again, the text distances apparently unearthly and inexplicable events from the supernatural, claiming instead that medicine plays a vital part. There is an implication that mankind can achieve control over the human body, time and destiny if the power of science is both understood and harnessed. This is an idea that is expressed further as Glyndon's training intensifies:

Mejnour professed to find a link between all intellectual beings in the existence of a certain all-pervading and invisible fluid resembling electricity, yet distinct from the known operations of that mysterious agency – a fluid that connected thought to thought with the rapidity and precision of the modern telegraph, and the influence of this fluid, according to Mejnour, extended to the remotest past [...] mysteries which the Pythagoreans ascribed to the occult science. (p. 256)

The herbalism used by *Zanoni* seems very basic in comparison to the rapid telegraph-like action of this electric substance: a deeper and more clandestine scientific secret is

⁶¹ For a further critical analysis of the influence of herbalism in Victorian occult fiction see Brenda Mann Hammack's 'Phantastica: The Chemically Inspired Intellectual in Occult Fiction', *Mosaic*, n.s. 37:1 (March 2004), pp. 83-100.

beginning to emerge as the knowledge behind the Brotherhood's mysterious powers becomes ever more apparent. But what is perhaps even more disconcerting than medical secrets is the positioning of Mejnour in parallel with the popular early-Victorian practice of mesmerism. Immediately, the contemporary reader would have recognised Bulwer Lytton's vocabulary as alluding to this fashionable pseudo-science: words such as 'electricity', 'fluid', and 'telegraph' (p. 256) are characteristic of the quasi-medical discourse used when explaining the pseudo-phenomenon. Moreover, many critics have commented upon Bulwer Lytton's personal attraction to the practice and his use of mesmerism in fiction,⁶² detailing both its popularity and eventual discrediting in 1838.⁶³ Bulwer Lytton's 1842 publication of *Zanoni* – and even his incomplete 1838 *Zicci* manuscript – is within the period when mesmerism was no longer considered a reputable science: at this point in time, although there were still believers in the powers of mesmerism, its reputation was weakening. Animal magnetism was swiftly becoming stigmatised as a clever magic trick. There is, therefore, the suggestion that while the supernatural elements of *Zanoni* are brought into question, it is not merely herbalism or rational explanations which undermines them.

⁶²A personal friend of Bulwer Lytton, Lady Hills-Johnes, notes on her recollections of a visit to Knebworth in 1857 that 'on alluding to the remarkable instance of animal magnetism related in that book [by William V. Humboldt], he exclaimed, "I believe that there is no person in existence who has given this subject greater attention than I have"'. See Lady Hills-Johnes, Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS *Dolaucothi*, L8103, p. 6. She also goes on to discuss Bulwer Lytton's claim to have clairvoyant powers and how he 'offered to tell my fortune' (p. 10) after learning how to do so from fortune-telling gypsies.

⁶³ Respectable medical men such as John Elliotson, Thomas Wakely and W. B. Carpenter were pioneers of the practice before it was discredited in by the fraudulent O'Key sisters in the summer of 1838. For a more detailed examination of mesmerism in Bulwer Lytton's work see, for example, Gavin Budge's essay, 'Mesmerism and Medicine in Bulwer-Lytton's Novels of the Occult' in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, eds. Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006) pp. 39-59 which focuses on both *Zanoni* and *A Strange Story*. In this work, Budge argues that while these texts do not contain depictions of mesmerism as a practice, Bulwer Lytton does use mesmeric imagery as in the simultaneous death scene between Viola and Zanoni, suggesting a mesmeric affinity between the couple.

Zanoni's liminal position between immortal magician and powerful scientist shifts as his relationship with Viola deepens. As the novel progresses – and Zanoni's connection with the marginal, albeit Christian, Brotherhood weakens – a more intensely spiritual side to his character develops, an aspect that is repeatedly connected with Christ-like imagery:

'Sometimes I have seen thee in my dreams surrounded by shapes of glory and light; thy looks radiant with a celestial joy [...] Stranger thou hast saved me, and I thank and bless thee' [...] with these words she crossed her arms meekly on her bosom, and inclined lowly before him. (p. 97)

Viola's tone, actions and use of language consciously allude to biblical images associated with Jesus: dreams commonly occur throughout the Old and New Testament as a way of communicating God's wishes to earthbound mortals.⁶⁴ In the Gospel of Matthew the three Magi, who travel to visit the newborn Jesus at Bethlehem, are warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod and, as a result, depart on another safe route home.⁶⁵ This same Gospel then continues to describe how an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, telling him to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus and escape the jealous wrath of King Herod.⁶⁶ While these are just two examples from a single Book of the Bible – perhaps the best-known occurrence of a biblical dream is Joseph and his coat of many colours from the Book of Genesis⁶⁷ – they nevertheless reiterate the point that dream-messages are an intricate part of the biblical framework and are often a technique used to protect individuals from

⁶⁴ While I am aware that a great deal of psychoanalytical research has been undertaken into dreams and their complex meaning, this is not the focus of my interest. I only cite the various biblical references to dreams without going into depth about the psychology behind them. For more information on biblical dreams see Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, trans Jill Munro (Sheffield: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999).

⁶⁵ 'The New Testament' in *The Revised English Bible*, ed. Donald Coggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 2. All further references to the New Testament of the Bible are to this edition and given parenthetically in the body of the thesis.

⁶⁶ 'New Testament', *English Bible*, p. 2.

⁶⁷ 'The Old Testament' in *The Revised English Bible*, ed. Donald Coggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 31. All further references to the Old Testament of the Bible are to this edition and given parenthetically in the body of the thesis.

unforeseen dangers. Moreover, with regard to Bulwer Lytton's text, Viola not only views Zanoni as her saviour, but reinforces his almost divine presence by speaking of the man's 'celestial joy' (p. 97): she is both humbled and in awe of him.⁶⁸

But it is not only prophetic dreams which position Zanoni alongside Heavenly imagery. Often his behaviour seems consciously to echo that of Jesus; parallels can be drawn between Christ's crucifixion, in which he sacrificed himself for mankind, and Zanoni's decision to forfeit his immortality by exchanging places with Viola and dying on the guillotine.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Zanoni also surrenders his life in order to protect his wife and child from another evil in the shape of the haunting Dweller of the Threshold who has already plagued the anguished Glyndon. In events leading up to Zanoni's death, this demonic spirit taunts him:

Ha! ha! – thou canst save her life, if thou wilt sacrifice thine own! Is it for this thou hast lived on through crumbling empires and countless generations of thy race? At last shall Death reclaim thee? Wouldst thou save her? – *die for her!* [...] Silent! Art thou ready for the sacrifice? (p. 427)

⁶⁸ Zanoni as a saviour-figure has been somewhat overlooked in literary criticism. However, Sondra Ford Swift's essay 'Toward the Vampire as Saviour: Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's *Saint-Germain* Series Compared with Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni*' in *The Blood is Life: Vampires in Literature*, ed. Leonard G. Heldreth and Mary Pharr (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), pp. 155-64 argue that Zanoni is a true saviour but not in a biblical sense. The critic explores the idea that Zanoni's immortality and mysterious power make him almost vampire-like before arguing that the vampire can be a sympathetic character.

⁶⁹ It is interesting that Zanoni's actions have historical parallels. During the French Revolution a young French girl named Madeleine de Coigny exchanged places with a prisoner so that she could die alongside her lover Andreas Chénier. This was a relatively well-known tale during the Victorian period and was even adapted by Umberto Giordano into an Opera in four Acts entitled 'Andreas Chénier' (1896). For more information on this Opera see: John Marrack and Ewan West, 'Andrea Chénier', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t77.e129> [accessed 9 January 2008]. There are also echoes of this tale in Charles Dickens's 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. Andrew Sanders, in "'Cartloads of Books': Some Sources for *A Tale of Two Cities*" in *Dickens and Other Victorians: Essays in Honour of Phillip Collins*, ed. Joanne Shattock (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 37-52 explores the direct influences on Dickens's plot but focuses primarily on Wilkie Collins's drama *The Frozen Deep* and Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution* with only a few brief allusions to Bulwer Lytton. Moreover, Valerie Purton's 'Dickens and Bulwer Lytton: the Dandy Reclaimed?', *Dickensian*, n.s. 74 (1978), pp. 25-9 suggests that '[i]n *Not so Bad as We Seem* there are several foreshadowings of Dickens's later novels: the heroine Lucy, in her almost-maternal devotion to her father, surely suggests another Lucy in *A Tale of Two Cities*' (p. 26) but fails to mention *Zanoni*.

While this monstrosity is most commonly viewed as a Gothic construction, I suggest that the Dweller's portrayal is more closely linked to biblical depictions of Satan.⁷⁰ The shapeless spirit's hissing voice shadows Zanoni's every move; just as the mocking serpent in the Garden of Eden tempts Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge⁷¹ and Jesus is tempted by Satan during his forty days and nights in the wilderness, so too does the Dweller entice Zanoni to relinquish Viola and retain his immortality.⁷² More specifically, as the demon's power over Zanoni, his family and Glyndon intensifies, Zanoni is forced to perform a kind of exorcism in order to weaken its evil hold. After being troubled by an '[u]nutterable Horror' (p. 411) for several years, Glyndon has turned to Zanoni for help. Although the Mystic's powers are weak as a result of his detachment from the brotherhood, Zanoni comforts the suffering man by stating that his '[r]esolve is the first success. Rejoice, for the exorcism is sure' (p. 411). Consequently, Zanoni:

laid his hand gently on the burning temples of his excited and wondering listener [Glyndon]; and presently a sort of trance came over him [...] he thought he fell upon his knees to pray. He woke – he woke in delicious tears: he felt that the phantom was fled forever. (p. 412)

This is evocative of a Christian exorcism.⁷³ In the course of the ritual, Glyndon loses control over his body, falling into a stupor as the touch of Zanoni begins the process of liberating the mortal from the haunting demon. It is significant that during this ritual, Glyndon turns to prayer: at the climax both Zanoni and Heaven are positioned

⁷⁰ For a more detailed description of the Devil's portrayal throughout the Gospels, see, for example, Peter Vardy's *The Puzzle of Evil* (London: Harper, 1992). In this work, Vardy states that in 'the Book of Job, the devil is clearly portrayed as a tempter and tormentor of man' before emphasising how 'the Devil is much more prominent in the New Testament than the Old. He tempts Jesus in the Wilderness and throughout the Gospels he shows his opposition to Jesus through the demon spirits' (p. 56).

⁷¹ 'Old Testament', *English Bible*, p. 2.

⁷² See 'New Testament', *English Bible*, pp. 2-3, p. 30, pp. 52-53.

⁷³ An exorcism is the practice of a driving out demons from a possessed person or building by reading the Rite of Exorcism which was available in both the Catholic and Church of England faiths. For more information on exorcism in early modern England see, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England: Contemporary Texts and their Cultural Contexts*, ed. Philip C. Almond (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

as the man's saviours. There is an implication that, through such practices, Zanoni is undertaking God's work on earth.

Although the custom of driving a devil out of a possessed human body is more frequently interwoven with medieval and early-modern witchcraft discourses, during such witch-crazes only a Catholic priest could actually perform an exorcism and the Church has always been intimately connected with such practices. This was, moreover, an issue which was foregrounded in the year prior to *Zanoni*'s publication, with periodicals such as the *Penny Magazine* discussing the close relationship between Christianity and the supernatural. In an article entitled 'The Occult Sciences' the anonymous author states that '[a]llusions to the practices of magic or divination abound in the Scriptures'.⁷⁴ Exorcism is upheld as one of the miracles that Christ performed on various occasions. For example, in the Gospel of Mark, the story of the epileptic boy describes how Jesus of Nazareth saves a possessed child by speaking directly to the devil saying, '[t]hou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him'.⁷⁵ It is not only Christ's words and actions, however, which have the power to repel evil, as he also taught his disciples to conduct exorcisms. Once again, it is Mark's Gospel which describes how Jesus 'called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth two by two; and gave them power over unclean spirits'.⁷⁶ Zanoni's actions implicitly position him conterminously with exorcism stories, suggesting that it is religion which allows him to perform incredible feats and function as the novel's Christ-figure.

⁷⁴ Anon., 'The Occult Sciences', *Penny Magazine*, March 1841, n.s. 10:565, p. 110.

⁷⁵ 'New Testament', *English Bible*, p. 39. It is also relevant to note that this is only a single example of Christ as exorcist from the Gospels. Other exorcisms conducted by Christ are documented in the Gospels of Mark, Luke and Acts. See 'New Testament', *English Bible*, p. 34, p. 53, p. 123.

⁷⁶ 'New Testament', *English Bible*, p. 35.

If Zanon's presentation as the mysterious stranger starts off as unnervingly linked to occult science – he is the man with potions that defy mortality, and who has the gift of prophesy and preternatural knowledge – as the novel proceeds a far more complex portrayal develops. Slowly his behaviour moves away from the area of the supernatural into something more recognisably spiritual in the Christian sense. I contend that the narrative subverts the straightforward occult nature of the text to transform Zanon into a saviour who unexpectedly shares distinctive characteristics with Jesus. Edward Bulwer Lytton's reservations surrounding the novel's reception, therefore, hint at his concerns regarding how the predominantly Anglican middle-class Victorian reader would react to such an unconventional narrative. These issues may explain the novel's relatively luke-warm reception and perhaps why Bulwer Lytton refrained from producing another occult novel until his 1862 publication of *A Strange Story*. While Bulwer Lytton turned his attention to writing 'domestic' fiction, this thesis suggests that his personal fascination with the supernatural and esoteric secret societies feeds directly into his work.

(iii)

As *Zanon* demonstrates, a focus on the supernatural opens up a hornet's nest of problems surrounding medicine, pseudo-science and spirituality. Indeed, the whole framework of a rational society that tirelessly foregrounded the nineteenth-century ethos of scientific advancements, imperial dominance and a hierarchical class system may be seen as a direct consequence of the need to establish a positive counter-weight to a morass of paranormal fascination that the Victorians themselves were subjected to, even if they barely realised or comprehended it. In stark contrast to *Zanon*, therefore, Edward Bulwer Lytton's early-Victorian Caxton trilogy – consisting of *The*

Caxtons: A Family Picture (1848), “*My Novel*” or *Varieties in English Life* (1853) and *What Will He Do With It?* (1859) – could be seen as a reaction not only to the critical response to his earlier occult work, but intended also to satisfy a reading public who craved ‘acceptable’ fiction which depicted a recognisable reality.⁷⁷ The first instalment of *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* was published anonymously in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* in April 1848 and ran until October 1849.⁷⁸ Unmistakably belonging to the tradition of domestic fiction, the novel follows the Caxton family’s struggles and achievements as seen through the eyes of its narrator Pisistratus Caxton.⁷⁹ Born to an attentive mother and academic father, Pisistratus documents the various influences on his young life, such as his militaristic and honourable Uncle Roland de Caxton, the unreliable speculator Uncle Jack, the mysterious Francis Vivian and beautiful Fanny Trevanion, before Pisistratus emigrates to Australia to make his fortune and return to England as a wealthy and respectable man.

⁷⁷ In the context of this thesis, I am going to limit my research to *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* (1848) which is the first novel in the Caxton trilogy.

⁷⁸ As with a great deal of Edward Bulwer Lytton’s fiction, *The Caxtons* (1848) has received relatively little critical attention. Charles W. Snyder’s ‘Edward Bulwer Lytton and the “Cult of the Colonies”’ in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton*, pp. 174-83 and *Liberty and Morality: A Political Biography of Edward Bulwer-Lytton* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) both suggest that Edward Bulwer Lytton’s interest in the colonies and Britain’s position as an Imperial nation stems from his role at the Colonial Office. Moreover, Allan Conrad Christensen’s ‘Writing and Unwriting in *The Caxtons*, “*My Novel*” and *A Strange Story*’ in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton*, pp. 200-11 explores the importance of writing texts in each narrative while James J. Barnes’s ‘Edward Lytton Bulwer and the Publishing firm of Harper and Brothers’, *American Literature*, n.s. 38:1 (March 1966), pp. 35-48 looks more generally at the publishing history of the Caxton trilogy. However, it is Peter W. Sinnema’s ‘Between Men: Reading the Caxton trilogy as Domestic Fiction’ in *The Subverting Vision of Bulwer Lytton*, pp. 184-99 that is perhaps most interesting. This work explores the ideology of domesticity that influences *The Caxtons* but again focuses upon the ‘home’ as being England which is the ‘location of the coloniser’s racial and moral identity’ (p. 186). I suggest that Bulwer Lytton adheres to yet simultaneously distorts the Victorian idea of ‘hearth and home’.

⁷⁹ John Sutherland’s, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction* (Essex: Longman, 1990), pp. 192-93 states that ‘the domestic novel exists as a well-defined anti-type, which gave the sensation novelists of the 1860s a sense of their identity’. For more information on Victorian domestic fiction see Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Importantly, *The Caxtons* signalled the author's decision to move away from his more controversial crime and supernatural fiction. Yet his decision to publish the novel anonymously suggests that even the flamboyant Bulwer Lytton shied away from any further criticism: there is an implication also that he did not feel comfortable writing in the domestic genre and so consciously concealed his identity.⁸⁰ It could also be argued that he intentionally clouded the authorship of *The Caxtons* as a result of his own marital breakdown in 1836 and the bitter relations with his estranged wife. In a journal entry of 1838, Bulwer Lytton confesses that 'I fear [the public] will get weary of my name'⁸¹ before declaring that 'I tremble every day least my domestic sores should be dragged still more into light, and all that is most sacred in men's hearths and homes exposed to [...] public gossip'.⁸² This comment suggests that Bulwer Lytton's decision to produce domestic fiction sits uneasily with his own real-life experiences. Regardless of his concealed identity and motives in writing domestic fiction, however, the fact is that he made a clear break into a new genre of writing. As Bulwer Lytton's grandson, Victor Alexander Bulwer Lytton, states, 'in *The Caxtons* [...] he struck out an entirely new line'⁸³ while John Sutherland notes that the novel 'with its domestic tone, marks a turning-point in Bulwer Lytton's career, and in Victorian fiction generally. It was immensely popular throughout the period'.⁸⁴ *The Caxtons* satisfied the demands of the early-Victorian public: it upheld popular beliefs

⁸⁰ For more information on contemporary reaction to the anonymous authorship, see Victor A. G. R. Bulwer Lytton, *The Life*, II. pp. 104-06. Moreover, for a more general examination of the issue of anonymous authorship see Dallas Liddle, 'Salesmen, Sportsmen, Mentors: Anonymity and Mid-Victorian Theories of Journalism', *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 41:1 (Autumn 1997), pp. 31-69.

⁸¹ Quoted in Victor A. G. R. Bulwer Lytton, *The Life*, II. p. 10.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸³ Victor A. G. R. Bulwer Lytton, *The Life*, II. pp. 30-31.

⁸⁴ John Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction*, p. 111. However, an online article by Thomas Morgan, 'Edward Bulwer-Lytton: The Pioneering Novelist Who Became a Literary Joke' in *The Lost Club Journal*. Available at <http://homepages.pavilion.co.uk/users/tartarus/lytton.html> [accessed 12 December 2008] foregrounds Charles W. Snyder's criticism of John Sutherland's entries on Bulwer Lytton in *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, stating that 'we learn only that Sutherland finds Bulwer-Lytton boring, perhaps because he was so very Victorian. Yet that is all the more reason to understand the man and his work, if you want to understand that era'.

of the sanctity of the home and the nuclear family.⁸⁵ Unlike *Zanoni's* portrayal of marital breakdown, occult secrets and political unrest, *The Caxtons* frequently alludes to not only middle-class family life, but also to its own location in reality. Even before the narrative begins, the preface emphasises this feature:

The plot is extremely slight; the incidents are few, and [...] may be found in the records of ordinary life. Regarded as a Novel, this attempt is an experiment somewhat apart from previous works of the author [...] it is the first [...] in which man has been viewed less in his active relations with the world, than in his repose at his own hearth;- in a word, the greater part of the canvas has been devoted to the completion of a simple family life.⁸⁶

Bulwer Lytton's 'experiment', therefore, was a self-conscious break from his previous literary endeavours. In a world that fiercely attempted to uphold the ideological innocence of childhood and the need for a stable hearth and home, society looked to literature to provide examples of acceptable domesticity.⁸⁷ In a society already disrupted by the 1832 Reform Act a desire to preserve class stability emerged; the

⁸⁵ The issue of the Victorian home has received a great deal of critical attention, focusing on the way in which the 'cult of the family' emerged during the early- and mid-Victorian period. For example, Ralph Dutton's *The Victorian Home* (London: Batsford, 1954) gives a general account of the way in which the home was constructed during this period while Thad Logan's *The Victorian Parlour: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) looks at the way in which the rise of the Victorian middle classes and their eager desire to consume and display mass-produced goods resulted in the Victorian parlour acting as a microcosm of British life. More specifically with regard to Victorian literature, Monica F. Cohen's work entitled *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel: Women, Work and Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) analyses Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*, Dickens's *Great Expectations* and *Little Dorrit* and George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* to argue that the boundaries between the masculine public world of action and the domestic and feminised space of the home are not so clear cut: the mobilisation of masculine discourses into feminine work disrupts rigid hierarchies. But perhaps the most influential aspect of the Victorian home is the idea of the woman acting as the 'angel in the home' as portrayed in Coventry Patmore's 1854 book-length poem *The Angel in the House*.

⁸⁶ Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* (London: Routledge, 1888), p. 1. All further references to *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis.

⁸⁷ The issue of childhood and the Victorians is considered by Anthony Burton in his 'Small Adults: Education and the Life of Children', in *The Victorian Vision*, ed. John Mackenzie (London: V&A Publication, 2001), pp. 75-95. This explores the idea that up until the nineteenth century, children were treated as miniature adults. Burton defines childhood as occupying the years ensuing between infancy and puberty that were shaped by various cultural, social and economic factors. More specifically, the work of the modern historical constructionist Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), looks chronologically at representations of the child with regard to dress, social standing and the child's status before the law. Ariès can see little before the seventeenth century that is recognisable, in modern terms, as childhood or the child. Peter Coveney's *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature* (London: Rockliff, 1957) looks at the notion of childhood in literature from William Blake to Charles Dickens and George Eliot while placing such representations in their cultural and historical context.

early-Victorians needed a sense of tradition, something that would help to contain the lower classes in their proper place.⁸⁸ The notion of a wholesome domestic sphere seemed to offer in part a solution to this social and cultural dilemma, and the middle-class family became a glorified ideal, a constant in a society in flux. As is apparent in the preface to *The Caxtons*, even an author as unconventional as Edward Bulwer Lytton turned to this genre as a means of satisfying both his critics and his middle-class readers.

Centrally, the text confronts us with the notion of family harmony. Almost immediately the reader is presented with an important event in family life: the birth of Mr and Mrs Caxton's first and only child. Signalling the beginning of not only Pisistratus Caxton's existence but also his role as narrator-hero, the event is marked by the respectable phrenologist Mr. Squills, who tells the new parents that 'your son will be a comfort to you both [...] [h]e will be a dove of peace to your ark' (p. 5).⁸⁹ The language foregrounds a feeling of stability: a son is presented as a blessing that will enhance the home and bring a sense of fulfilment to the lives of his parents. The family of Austin and Kitty Caxton is shown to be completed by the birth of a male heir. Moreover, as the narrative develops and Pisistratus nears manhood, the text is

⁸⁸ The 1832 First Reform Act challenged aristocratic privileges in Parliament. After two unsuccessful Reform Bills sparked public rioting in Nottingham, Derby and Bristol and forced the intervention of King William IV, a third Bill was finally passed on 4 June 1832 by the House of Lords to widen the enfranchisement of male householders and signal what the historian Llewellyn Woodward in *The Age of Reform 1815-1870* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) deemed to be 'a turning point in modern English history' (p.87). Although this controversial law only fractionally expanded the franchise – it added 217,000 voters who were all upper-middle class householders – it nevertheless went some way to rectify the under representation of new manufacturing towns in Parliament and simultaneously satisfied public demand. For further information see, for example, Chris Cook in *The Routledge Companion to Britain in the Nineteenth Century 1815-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

⁸⁹ The practice of phrenology is based on the hypothesis that character traits can be 'read' by analysing the shape of a person's skull. Developed in 1796 by Franz Joseph Gall, it was a complex theory which became increasingly popular throughout early-Victorian Britain. For further information see, for example, Roger Cooter's *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organisation of Consent in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

replete with a variety of moral lessons which the father imparts to his son as *The Caxtons* becomes increasingly didactic in tone and content. But what is noticeable is that as a result of this sheltered upbringing, Pisistratus is portrayed as a sensitive protagonist. After painfully enduring a period of unrequited love and its concomitant emotional turmoil, the impressionable young man reflects that:

Looking back now, I am dismayed at the remembrance of my own sufferings: my health became seriously affected: I dreaded alike the trial of the day and the anguish of the night. My only distractions were in my visits to Vivian, and my escape to the dear circle of home. And that home was my safe-guard and preservative in that crisis of my life. (p. 174)

Home is described as a 'circle', a place with secure boundaries that offers protection from the harm of the outside world. Such powerful language implies that Pisistratus subscribes to the idea of the nuclear family: his father and mother function as role models in addition to being a source of reassurance. It is significant that in times of distress the family home provides him with the help that he needs: Pisistratus Caxton's successful transmission from child to respectable adult is presented as a direct consequence of his careful upbringing and the sanctity of the home.

Beneath this wholesome family façade, however, are subtle tensions which persistently unsettle the narrative. Although the main protagonist remains almost flawless in his behaviour, ideas and conduct towards others, it is those on the margins of the Caxton family who threaten to bring discontent and disruption. Perhaps nowhere is this more obvious than in the character of Uncle Jack. Unreliable, eccentric and frivolous in spending his own wealth and that of other people, this figure of excess almost ruins his middle-class relatives. Mr. Caxton loses over half of his savings to Jack's debtors: '[m]y mother hung down her pretty head, and looked ashamed. My uncle retreated quite into the corner [...] [t]he silence would have been

appalling to another man: nothing appalled Uncle Jack' (p. 255). Unaware of having inflicted humiliation on his family, Jack's lack of remorse works to heighten his crime. This financial setback forces the family to rent out their beloved 'brick house' (p. 285) and move into the ruined 'Tower' (p. 260) of another relative, Uncle Roland. The secure family house has, literally and figuratively, been lost. Pisistratus's childhood memories are sacrificed as the whole family relocate to a crumbling and derelict building which resembles a Gothic fantasy rather than a solid middle-class Victorian home. Significantly, there seems to be a narrative shift as soon as this unfortunate event occurs: supernatural elements invade the text and are associated with the new family dwelling. In true Gothic tradition, the Tower's underground corridors and unexplained hideaways are quickly revealed. Finding a secret door, Pisistratus and his 'elf-like' (p. 264) cousin Blanche explore the 'ghost-trap' room at the end of a 'dark passage' (p. 265) and discover 'what seems to me [Pisistratus] a child's cradle – not an English one [...] and I would have scarcely have known it to be a cradle but for the fairy-like quilt' (p. 266). The tone and language is suggestive of an oral folk or fairytale. This hidden room is redolent of Uncle Roland's ghostly memories, which are of the mysterious and absent son who seems to haunt the broken man throughout the text. In spite of Bulwer Lytton's break away from writing occult stories, the disconcertingly paranormal elements of *The Caxtons* imply that he cannot desert the supernatural entirely.

In *The Caxtons*, allusions to the supernatural are deliberately understated but, nevertheless, they work to disrupt the realist structure. In addition to Uncle Roland's crumbling home and dysfunctional family history – he closely guards the identity of his wayward son and the details of his failed marriage to a Spanish woman – is

superstition, bound up on the figure of Pisistratus's 'tale-telling' (p. 11) nurse, Mrs. Primmins. Although this woman is not related to the Caxtons, her position as faithful servant and nursemaid suggests that she is regarded as an integral member of the extended family:

She had reared my mother before me [...] She was a Devonshire woman – and Devonshire women especially those who have passed their youth near the sea-coast, are generally superstitious. She had a wonderful budget of fables. Before I was six years old, I was erudite in [...] primitive literature. (p. 11)

While superstition seems to be an accepted fact of rural life and quite free from any sinister associations, the idea of educating a child in 'primitive literature' is unsettling. Mrs. Primmins has a great deal of control over the young boy and feeds his imagination with folklore and fairytales: surprisingly, the supernatural here comfortably coexists with rational thinking. As the novel proceeds, and the young Pisistratus grows into a man the nursemaid's superstitious teachings continue to influence the narrative hero. For example, after feeling a strange insect-like creature 'crawling just by the nape of [...] [his] neck' (p. 142), Pisistratus becomes irrational as he states 'I [...] [had] a vivid recollection of a story told me by Mrs. Primmins' (p. 143) about 'how a lady for many years suffered [...] headaches [...] how she died; and how her head was opened, and how such a nest of earwigs' (p. 143) was found in her skull. It is significant that it is this story which leads the young man to refer to the creature on his neck as a 'beast' (p. 143) before confessing that 'there [...] [was] something awful and preternatural' (p. 143) in the event. The language emphasises how illogical fears overwhelm rational thinking; that a young man reverts to supernatural childhood fables is in direct conflict with this early-Victorian realist tale of progress. Frequently, then, the text seems to operate at two levels. At one level, Mrs Primmins's folktales are just harmless nonsense. But there is always a sinister

undertone, adding an extra layer of complexity to her portrayal. Even though these are 'just' superstitions, the effect which they have upon rational adults suggests that there is an alternative way of thinking in Britain, even if it exists only on the country's geographical fringes and in the beliefs of its rural population.⁹⁰

Complications implicit in superstitious thought insidiously but insistently disrupt *The Caxtons*. What becomes obvious is that, regardless of the realism which moulds the narrative, a reliance upon the paranormal remains: there seems to be no appropriate discourse to explain certain events as faint traces of supernatural vocabulary invade the domestic novel. This is perhaps most obvious at the climax of the narrative, when Pisistratus and Uncle Roland rescue the kidnapped Fanny Trevanion only to find that her would-be seducer is Herbert Caxton. Roland's disgraced son, who has concealed his identity and taken the pseudonym of Vivian Francis. After revealing his son's guilt, Roland declares:

It is I who, from this spot, launch upon his head – a father's curse. Violator of the hearth! Baffled ravisher! – go thy way to the doom which thou hast chosen for thyself. God will be merciful to me yet, and give me a grave before thy course find its close in the hulks. (p. 331)

There is a supernatural element in Roland's reaction. Rather than rationally threatening to disinherit or report Vivian to the relevant authorities, Roland chooses to place a curse upon him. Once more, seemingly rational characters revert to irrational superstition. A curse is inherently supernatural, suggesting a power which defies mortal control. Vivian's shame in bringing scandal and dishonour upon his family is presented less as a crime than as a sin that must be dealt with in the most appropriate fashion; that is, a spell-like curse that will haunt and torment the young man. What is

⁹⁰ I will explore the issue of rural superstitions in greater detail in the Thomas Hardy section of Chapter Two.

perhaps even more significant is the way in which Roland's language alters as he utters the curse. There is a powerfully biblical tone: words such as 'doom' (p. 331) and 'grave' (p. 331) are suggestive of spiritual suffering while the phrase 'God will be merciful to me [...] before thy course find its close in the hulks' (p. 331) suggests that somehow Roland is conducting the Lord's work on earth. Additionally, the reference to the hulks is evocative of the Victorian legal system: the language of the law is mixed with religion and mysticism to symbolically emphasise how Roland draws upon well established and powerful discourses in order to assert his authority over his disobedient son. As in *Zanoni*, therefore, there is a clear religious dimension woven into the superstition which begins to shape even the least likely of characters and ordinary situations.

Throughout *The Caxtons* it is the main protagonist who fulfils a saviour-like role, especially evident in Pisistratus's behaviour towards the outcast Vivian Francis. Unaware that Vivian is Uncle Roland's shamed son, Pisistratus befriends the destitute man, offering him employment and a respectable income before attempting to reform his 'savage nature' (p. 175). As this unconventional friendship deepens, and Vivian's volatile personality reveals itself, the reader becomes aware that elements of a bipartite soul – the notion that good and bad co-exist in every human – begin to shape his portrayal. The internal divide between what Pisistratus described as Vivian's 'evil ... [and] envenomed spirit' (p. 174) and his more agreeable characteristics is what attracted Pisistratus. The protagonist-narrator admits that he had 'conceived a keen interest in the struggle between the bad that revolted, and the good that attracted' (p. 326). Essentially, a familiar pattern emerges as the righteous Pisistratus Caxton adheres to the basic Christian concept of forgiveness: his moral upbringing and sense of honour enable him to take up a pedagogical position as mentor in order to reform

the sinner, Vivian. Allusions to biblical parables of redemption – wherein Jesus encourages the belief that the soul is never completely corrupt – develop as this friendship intensifies. Indeed, Vivian refers to his charitable friend as his ‘good angel’ (p. 211) and is forced to rely upon Pisistratus’s Christian nature in order to improve his character and social status. Although the representation of Pisistratus is arguably linked to that of Zanoni in the religious context of a saviour, there is, nevertheless, a variation between these two very different characters. The hero of *The Caxtons* does not display those elements linked to Christ which are so overtly connected with Zanoni: Pisistratus’s position seems to be more that of a role model, someone whom Vivian can imitate in order to progress in middle-class Victorian society. Furthermore, Pisistratus’s position as peacemaker and mentor continues when he pleads with his uncle to ‘[s]pare [...] [Vivian]’ (p. 331) and ultimately saves his cousin from his father’s supernatural curse by encouraging Roland to forgive his son. Relentless in his desire to reform Vivian morally and reunite him with his father and younger sister, Pisistratus tells his cousin that ‘[y]our sister is a part of Home. If you think yourself worthy of either, go and claim both’ (p. 377). By the conclusion of *The Caxtons*, therefore, the ‘family picture’ is restored: home is once again a sacred space and the suggestively supernatural dangers that threatened to destroy domestic tranquillity are negated.

(iv)

Edward Bulwer Lytton’s *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* (1849) and the sequels which comprise the Caxton trilogy are, on the surface, evidence of his most decisive break away from the occult. But I suggest that this controversial Victorian novelist could not fully disengage himself from the paranormal. Although he refrained from

producing occult novels again up until his 1861-2 publication of *A Strange Story*, which is traditionally held to signal his return to the genre, Bulwer Lytton's desire to emulate canonical Victorian authors such as Charles Dickens, Elisabeth Gaskell and George Eliot – drove him to return to occult fiction, albeit in short story form, in the years prior to *A Strange Story*.⁹¹ Perhaps his most interesting yet critically neglected ghost tale is *The Haunted and the Haunters; or, the House and the Brain* (1859).⁹² Published in *Blackwood's* in the same year that the last volume of the Caxton trilogy concluded its serialisation, this work brings together a variety of issues which are only alluded to in his previous works; the home that is threatened in *The Caxtons: A Family Picture* completely falls apart in the short story as the rigid boundaries of domestic fiction are broken to challenge the ideal of the sanctity of the home in a much more disconcerting manner.

The Haunted and the Haunters is a text with many layers. Superficially, it conforms to the tradition of the ghost stories commonly published in periodicals such as *All the Year Round*, *Household Words* and *The Illustrated London News*. Nevertheless, Bulwer Lytton's text distances itself from a Gothic framework, choosing instead to position science and rational thought alongside superstitious belief

⁹¹ Charles Dickens had achieved success with, for example, the publication of *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839) while Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853) and George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) also secured popularity for these female authors. For more information on the Victorian ghost story in general, see Julia Briggs, *The Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), the introduction to *The Oxford Book of Victorian Ghost Stories*, eds. Michael Cox and R. A. Gilbert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) and Jack Sullivan's *Elegant Nightmares: The English Ghost Story from Le Fanu to Blackwood* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1978).

⁹² Although this short story was originally published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in August 1857, it has since been published as a novella and, as a result, is often referenced as *The Haunted and the Haunters; or, the House and the Brain*. For clarity and consistency, I am going to refer to the novella as *The Haunted and the Haunters; or, the House and the Brain*. *The Haunted and the Haunters* has received little critical attention. Most research into Bulwer Lytton tends to focus predominantly on his novels as opposed to any of his short stories. One of the few articles which concentrate entirely on this single text is Mark Knight's 'The Haunted and the Haunters: Bulwer Lytton's Philosophical Ghost Story', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, n.s. 28:2 (September 2006), pp. 245-55 which looks at the issue of Materialism in the text. Knight explores the relationship between Materialism and Idealist philosophy, using a more scientific lens to analyse the narrative.

in unearthly events. More specifically, the plot focuses on a single event: a nameless gentleman narrator comes across a haunted property in the middle of London and decides to stay overnight in order to unravel the mystery behind the seemingly supernatural phenomena which occur. After witnessing ghostly apparitions, the descent into madness of his valet and the death of his dog, the man departs from the house the next morning and informs its owner that he must demolish one of the rooms. As this specific part of the house is removed, a secret room is discovered that contains mesmeric equipment. But at this crucial point of the narrative Bulwer Lytton is indecisive: the original 1859 ending of the story concludes with a meeting between the narrator and a Mr. Richards, the previous owner of the house, a meeting in which the older man mesmerises the narrator in order to manipulate his mesmerised subject into predicting Richards's future. However, the revised 1864 ending erases the character of Mr. Richards completely, choosing instead to close with the destruction of the mesmeric apparatus and the restoration of normality.⁹³ In both versions, though, the emphasis on the use of rational thought to explain apparently unnatural events remains clear. But, regardless of science or the supernatural, the fact that the Victorian house is under some form of attack is indisputable: less than twelve months after his

⁹³ While I am aware that the story has two very different endings, I am arguing that the later version of *The Haunted and the Haunters* suggests that Bulwer Lytton distanced himself slightly from science, and pseudo-science, in order to foreground the Christian aspects of the novel. For a more detailed analysis of the impact and reasons behind the two conclusions see Knight, 'Lytton's Philosophical Ghost Story' in *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*. It is also interesting that Bulwer Lytton's second ending – whereby the narrator destroys the mesmeric equipment which consists of a magnetic needle – bears some resemblance to an experiment undertaken by the author himself. Indeed, Lady Hills-Johnes recalls about her 1857 discussion with Bulwer Lytton about the snail telegraph – when two snails display a sympathetic connection so if one snail is isolated in a bottle and shaken, its sympathetic partner would also shake. She comments that 'Sir Edward heard of the snail telegraph from a remarkably clear-headed friend [...] His conversation with his friend led Sir Edward to think that possibly two sympathetic compasses might be constructed, the alphabet arranged round them, with the addition of two magnetic needles in such perfect sympathy that whatever letter one of the needles pointed to would be instantly indicated by the corresponding needle [...] the compasses were made, but some mistake befell about the required conjunction of the starts, and the experiment failed'. See Lady Hills-Johnes, Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS *Dolaucothi*, L8103, p. 8.

celebrated Caxton trilogy ends, Bulwer Lytton moves away from the domestic sphere which had gained him the literary acclaim he craved.

The issue, however, is far more complex than the simple portrayal of a haunted house. While ghostly castles were a stock feature of Gothic tales, Bulwer Lytton's *The Haunted and the Haunters* seems to be manipulating the boundaries of the Victorian house so that the home and, more significantly, its inhabitants, are literally and metaphorically under attack: the early-Victorian ideal of the middle-class family is completely shattered as murder, betrayal and intrigue invade and destroy the sanctity of hearth and home. The narrator of *The Haunted and the Haunters* is not in the house for long before he realises that the strange footprints of a child and the 'large pale light – as large as the human figure'⁹⁴ are clearly somehow linked to a past crime. As he aimlessly wanders through each room of the house, clues are gathered to help solve the mystery. Finding old letters in the attic, he attempts to take them downstairs only to feel his 'wrist seized, and a faint soft effort made to draw' (p. 9) them from his hand. With his curiosity roused, the narrator hurriedly reads each letter and discovers that they hint at murder. The correspondence is from a young man to his wife and makes a profound impact on the narrator with their unnerving content:

"We ought to love each other," was one of the sentences I remember [...] Again: "Don't let any one be in the same room with you at night – you talk in your sleep." And again: "What's done can't be undone; and I tell you there's nothing against us unless the dead could come to life." Here was underlined in a better handwriting (a female's), "They do!" (pp. 9-10)

This idea of a husband and wife jointly conducting a murder completely subverts the Victorian preoccupation with the sanctity of marriage, while the phrase '[w]hat's done

⁹⁴ Edward Bulwer Lytton, *The Haunted and the Haunters: or, the House and the Brain* (Montana: Kessinger, 2005), p. 8. All further references to the *Haunted and the Haunters* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis.

can't be undone' (pp. 9-10) overtly echoes the words of Lady Macbeth.⁹⁵ Parallels can be drawn between Shakespeare's callous husband and wife, whose lust for power drives them to follow the predictions of the three weird sisters and murder King Duncan; their actions finally cause their own downfall. In Bulwer Lytton's text, the mysterious couple are finally exposed when the narrator discovers that they had killed the woman's rich brother in order to become guardians of his orphaned son, then intentionally caused the child's death through neglect. Infanticide, greed and deceit invade and destroy the home. The 'family picture' created in *The Caxtons* is, in *The Haunted and the Haunters*, shattered. The threat of the father's curse seen in this earlier novel comes to actuality in *The Haunted and the Haunters*, but what is even more significant is that in contrast to Pisistratus Caxton's view of the house as a shelter from the harsh outside world, in this short tale the home becomes a prison, containing ghosts from the past and concealing a deadly secret. The narrator enters the house and undertakes a variety of roles: he is a detective, a ghost hunter and an amateur scientist who is determined to reveal not only the mystery behind the letters, but also attempts to replace the notion of a supernatural curse with a rational explanation.

The implications of this are pursued – and pushed to the limit – through the text's repeated emphasis upon science and, more specifically, pseudo-science.⁹⁶ In contrast to Macbeth's entanglement with murder and witchcraft, the couple in this Victorian tale find themselves, and their crime, at the centre of a plot involving

⁹⁵ After Macbeth orders the murder of Banquo, Lady Macbeth tries to ease her husband's feelings of guilt: 'Things without all remedy/ Should be without regard. What's done is done'. William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* III.ii.13-14 in *The Norton Shakespeare: Tragedies*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean. E Howard and Katherine Eiseaman Maus (New York and London: Norton, 1997).

⁹⁶ Much Bulwer Lytton criticism focuses on his use of mesmerism in his work as well as his own personal interest in the practice which has already been discussed in some depth in this thesis with regard to *Zanoni*.

mesmerism as opposed to malign magic. Ironically, the narrator's 'experiment' (p. 4) to find out the cause of the strange happenings places him in a position where he becomes a part of another more sinister experiment. *The Haunted and the Haunters* develops into a tale that focuses on the power of pseudo-science to control human actions as well as inanimate objects: the brick house itself becomes the mesmerised subject and the mortals who enter the building become part of the mesmeric experience. When the narrator suggests that the strange occurrences are as a result of a mesmeric influence and a 'living human agency' (p. 19), the owner of the house questions this hypothesis, asking 'can you suppose that a mesmeriser could also affect inanimate objects: move chairs, open and shut doors?' (p. 19) This doubt is negated as the narrator explains that 'I see [...] nothing supernatural [...] I am persuaded that these are but agencies conveyed, as by electric wires, to my own brain from the brain of another [...] there is a natural chemistry' (p. 20). At one level the language draws upon conventional descriptions of mesmerism, but this ghost tale pushes the boundaries: in this depiction the mesmeric process symbolically controls lifeless objects as opposed to living beings. In an 1861 letter to John Forster, Bulwer Lytton himself comments upon electricity, believing it to be 'in inanimate objects as well as animate'.⁹⁷ Furthermore, the text's self-conscious allusion to contemporary technological advancements, such as the 1846 invention of the telegraph, is an aspect that has received much critical attention. Leslie Mitchell suggests that Bulwer Lytton was 'happiest when arguing that the supernatural was simply what science had not yet explored and codified'⁹⁸ while Robert L. Wolff comments that the author held a 'long association with [...] the interconnected phenomena of phrenology, animal magnetism

⁹⁷ Victor A. G. R. Bulwer Lytton, *The Life*, II. p. 48.

⁹⁸ Mitchell, *Bulwer Lytton*, p. 140.

and clairvoyance in England'.⁹⁹ Throughout *The Haunted and the Haunters*, the emphasis on science is clear. Unlike *Zanoni*'s quite obvious allusions to the practice of mesmerism, this later text suggests that there is more to this pseudo-science than meets the eye. However, as Mark Knight notes, the narrative's repeated emphasis on discovering rational grounds on which to explain the supernatural borders on Materialism, which was a 'position that Bulwer rejected on the grounds of its reductive conception of the universe'.¹⁰⁰ There is a suggestion, therefore, that a scientific methodology is not upheld as infallible: another equally powerful force is present and, as becomes more and more apparent, is articulated as some form of quasi-religion as elements of spirituality merge together with science.

Trying to reconcile competing ideas troubles both the narrator and the narrative structure of *The Haunted and the Haunters*. The conflict between scientific explanation and inexplicable supernatural elements disrupts the straightforward tale of a haunted house. This is evident in Bulwer Lytton's representation of the restless ghosts of the murdered boy and his guilty relatives. Although there is some attempt to explain this phenomenon as being connected with electricity and mesmerism, the unstable topic of unquiet spirits nevertheless forces mesmeric pseudo-science into the even more cloudy area of spiritualism.¹⁰¹ After hearing '[t]hree slow, loud, distinct

⁹⁹ Wolff, *Strange Stories*, p. 235.

¹⁰⁰ Knight, 'Lytton's Philosophical Ghost Story' in *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, p. 246. On page 249 of this article, Knight further reiterates Bulwer Lytton's aversion to the idea of Materialism in an essay he wrote entitled 'On the Spirit in Which New Theories Should be Received' whereby Bulwer Lytton labelled the concept as 'stupid'. For more information on Victorian attitudes towards Materialism see *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction*, eds. Mark Knight and Emma Mason (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 156-61. This article looks at the influence of secularisation and evolutionary theory had on popular Victorian novelists such as Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy and how such controversial ideas surrounding Church of England doctrine are reflected in their works.

¹⁰¹ With regard to Bulwer Lytton and spiritualism, much work has been undertaken into his tantalisingly ambiguous personal position *vis-à-vis* the popular practice. Nelson C. Stewart's *Lytton as Occultist* states that '[a]bout the year 1853 Lytton devoted a great deal of attention to spiritualism.

knocks' (p. 10) – commonly a signal of a spirit's willingness to enter the spiritualist *séance* – the narrator then describes how he witnesses 'a shape – a woman's shape. It was distinct as a shape of life, ghastly as a shape of death [...] [and] [a]s if from the door, though it did not open, there grew out a man's shape' (p. 15). The repetition of the word 'shape' suggests that the male and female spirits are not easily defined: they are not human and, as such, defy the containments of any earthly body. Moreover, these spirit-like figures appear directly after the narrator reads the incriminating letters, implying that his investigations have, albeit unconsciously, positioned him as a spiritualist medium: the man's desire to conjure the ghosts so that he can solve the mystery and find a rational explanation has almost willed them into being. Just as a spiritualist *séance* is constructed to manipulate the energy of the medium in order to reveal a spirit, so is the narrator positioned in a strikingly similar situation.

The Haunted and the Haunters seems, then, to draw upon the debate surrounding spiritualism: elements of religion, pseudo-science and witchcraft are all positioned alongside spiritualism to stimulate fierce controversy throughout the Victorian period. Significantly, Bulwer Lytton is just as indecisive about the issue himself. In a letter to his son written in 1853, nearly six years prior to the publication of this short ghost story, he confesses that:

I have been interested in the spirit manifestations. They are astounding [...] There is no trick, but I doubt much whether all be more than some strange clairvoyance passing from one human brain to another, or if spirits, something analogues to fairies or genii. Emily comes often, generally most incoherent [...] Shakespeare has come to me [...] I asked him to prove that he was a good

Published letters show that he was an unprejudiced and careful observer' (p. 31) while Robert L. Wolff's *Strange Stories*, p. 244 goes into some detail regarding Edward Bulwer Lytton's relationship with the medium, Daniel Dunglas Home and his relationship with the famous magician and occultist Eliphas Lévi. Wolff goes into some detail about the way in which Bulwer Lytton's view of spiritualism was never clear cut. While I briefly address the topic of spiritualism with regard to *The Haunted and the Haunters*, I go into greater detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

spirit sent by God, by telling me the closest secret I have, and he gave it instantly!¹⁰²

The implication here is that Edward Bulwer Lytton embraced spiritualism as a way of dealing with the death of his daughter, Emily – whose death from typhus in 1847 devastated her grieving father – and as a quasi-scientific experiment. His language emphasises that he does not completely trust the phenomenon, interrogating the apparition in order to prove its ‘reality’ but, at the same time, he cannot discover a logical explanation for events: a supernatural genii, clairvoyance, mesmerism and a religious vision are all alluded to as possible answers. Charles Dickens quite openly declared in a letter to Emile de La Rue on 9 March 1854 that ‘Bulwer is one of the true believers [in spiritualism]’¹⁰³ while Mme Home – the second wife of the most famous Victorian medium, Daniel Home – fuelled the rumour by announcing that Bulwer Lytton was ‘perfectly convinced of the genuineness of the phenomena’¹⁰⁴ but was ‘a typical example of a weak man who, above all things, fears ridicule. In public he was an investigator of spiritualism, in private a believer’.¹⁰⁵ Further, with regard to *The Haunted and the Haunters*, this image of turmoil and confusion is transferred into the text with the narrator commenting that:

¹⁰² Victor A. G. R. Bulwer Lytton, *The Life*, II. p. 43.

¹⁰³ Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds. Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, Angus Easson, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), III. p. 288.

¹⁰⁴ Mme. Dunglas Home, *D. D. Home: His Life and Mission* (London: Kegan Paul, 1888), p. 50. Daniel Dunglas Home also wrote extensively on the topic of spiritualism and his experiences as a medium. His work, *Incidents in My Life* (London: Tinsley, 1872) aimed to foreground the ‘truth of my statements which have remained uncontradicted [...] [and] truths of Spiritualism’ (p. vii).

¹⁰⁵ Mme. Dunglas Home, *Life and Mission*, p. 178. It is also significant that in her later work, *The Gift of D. D. Home* (London: Kegan Paul 1890), Mme Dunglas Home states that ‘long before he [Bulwer Lytton] met Home, his mind-or, rather, his imagination, had been coloured by superstitions derived from the mediaeval and mystical authors in whom he delighted. He saw the facts of Spiritualism through a haze of fancies concerning sylphs, gnomes, [and] “Dwellers on the Threshold”’ (p. 35). She then goes on to draw attention to the connections between spiritualism and *The Haunted and the Haunters*, suggesting that in ‘that singular and powerful story which he contributed anonymously to *Blackwood’s Magazine* [...] the phenomena described by the solitary watcher in the haunted house – the luminous form collapsing gradually into a vivid globule, the loud measured knocks at the bed-head, the vibrations of the floor, the grasp of an unseen hand [...] read like a transcript from Lord Lytton’s private records of his *séances* with Home at Knebworth’ (p. 35).

a power might extend over the dead – that is, over certain thoughts and memories that the dead may still retain – and compel, not [...] the Soul [...] but rather a phantom of [...] what has been most earth-stained on earth, to make itself apparent. (p. 19)

Indecisive about the source of this power, whether scientific or Godly, the narrator fails to offer any full explanation. The mesmeric conclusion of both versions attempts to provide some form of closure but the uncertainty nevertheless remains: indeed, while most critical attention focuses on the pseudo-scientific aspects of spiritualism, there is a less obvious but equally important religious framework and Bulwer Lytton's desire to explore the complex issue of the human soul continually colours the narrative.

In *The Haunted and the Haunters* religion does not seem to play a prominent role. On the surface, the emphasis is on the complex nature of electricity, mesmerism and spiritualism. Yet the images of restless spirits and, more significantly, demonic shadows breaks down the boundaries dividing these disparate topics. After the phantoms of the villainous man and woman have faded, the narrator is confronted with 'a Darkness shaping itself forth from the air' (p. 13) and, although overwhelmed with horror, he defiantly cries out "'I do not fear, my soul does not fear'" (p. 14). Parallels can be drawn between this corrupting shadow and *Zanoni's* demonic Dweller of the Threshold, while the reference to the strength of the human soul also has religious undertones. Moreover, this trope is pursued and pushed to the limit as the 'Darkness' (p. 13) takes a more recognisable shape:

Nothing now was left but the Shadow, and on that my eyes were intently fixed, till again eyes grew out of the Shadow – malignant serpent eyes [...] And now from those globules [of light] [...] monstrous things burst out [...] things transparent, supple, agile, chasing each other, devouring each other [...] crawling over my right arm, which was outstretched in involuntary command against all evil beings [...] I turned my sight from the shadow – above all from those strange serpent eyes [...] I was aware that there was a WILL, and a will

of intense creative, working evil, which might crush down my own. The pale atmosphere of the room began now to redden as if in the air of some conflagration'. (p. 16)

Stereotypical images of Hell and characteristics associated with Satan can be traced in Bulwer Lytton's nameless evil shadow. Serpent eyes allude to the book of Genesis, where the shape-shifting Devil takes the form of a snake in order to tempt Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, while the reference to a malignant will is again suggestive of Satan overpowering Eve with his cunning and his desire to overthrow God.¹⁰⁶ But the biblical language does not end here: the image of cannibalistic evil creatures swarming through fire and surrounding a Satanic shadow are evocative of the torture and suffering of condemned souls in Hell.

Indeed, this Victorian ghost story seems to draw directly upon the language and imagery of the New Testament as well as the Old. For example, the Gospel of Matthew documents the words of Christ, who warns a young child that sin will cause him to 'be cast into hell fire',¹⁰⁷ before speaking of 'the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'.¹⁰⁸ What seems to be happening in *The Haunted and the Haunters* is that, as in *Zanoni*, the narrator is confronted by a Satan-like malevolent being only to overcome the challenge. The narrator's words 'my soul does not fear' (p. 14) suggest that this is an internal battle for the mortal soul: his strength of character allows the narrator to overcome temptation and emerge from the room unscathed. Although this text was written nearly seventeen years after the publication of *Zanoni*, it seems that Bulwer Lytton cannot entirely depart from the topics which fascinated him. Similarly to *Zanoni*, a blend of occult and quasi-religious discourses

¹⁰⁶ 'Old Testament', *English Bible*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ 'New Testament', *English Bible*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 25.

influence *The Haunted and the Haunters*, encouraging the audience to read the text on a variety of levels.

The human soul was a topic which fascinated Bulwer Lytton and frequently emerges in his writings.¹⁰⁹ There is a sense that the complex idea of the soul works to unite a number of conflicting issues and provides the key to understanding why this controversial author blurs the boundaries between pseudo-science, spiritualism and religion in his works. In her recollection of a visit to his ancestral home at Knebworth in 1857, Lady Hills-Johnes reveals how Bulwer Lytton spoke of religion and the progress of the soul:

He did not believe that we should reach the highest Heaven when we died "No," he continued, "it is not likely that we, imperfect as we are, should suddenly be ushered into the Divine Presence on leaving this world; our minds would not be prepared for so much glory [...] [w]e shall pass through successive stages of existence, rising higher and higher until we reach the fullness of knowledge and happiness [...] Is not progression the order of all God's work here? Why not hereafter?" "It is strange" he went on, "that all spirits when questioned about Heaven agree in stating that into our next stage

¹⁰⁹ The issue of the soul troubled Victorian society even before the debate surrounding evolutionary theory and is a theme that is reflected in both the literature and art of the period. On a basic level, the idea of the soul is one of the central pillars of Christian theology and the understanding of the soul is attendant upon understanding the role of sin, the body, salvation and mankind's relationship to God: it has evolved as Christianity evolved. From about 200-350AD the complex Neo-Platonic understanding of the soul focused on the idea that the soul is a part of God which is imprisoned in the body. The aim of Neo-Platonic philosophy is to enable the individual to break the shackles of the body and reunite with God on a spiritual level. Moreover, a powerful early Christian theologian was Origen who, during the third century AD, drew upon a Neo-Platonic understanding of the soul's relationship to God and the body in order to explain the fall from Paradise. Thus, Origen and his followers believed that the ideal Christian life was one which rejected the body as being a prison for the incorporeal soul and attempted to devote the mind to God. Origen's understanding of the relationship of the soul to the body was highly popular and lasted well into the fourth century. Nevertheless, Origen's understanding left little place for Christ's incarnation in mankind's salvation and is an issue that marks the break between Ancient Christian and Neo-Platonic understandings of the relationship between the body and soul. Thus, what had previously been a dichotomous understanding which saw the body and soul conflicting now became more nuanced as, over the next thousand years, people tried to argue that the body was not inherently evil. Furthermore, one of the most important figures in the development of Western Christianity and who drew upon a Neo-Platonic understanding of the soul was Augustine of Hippo (later St. Augustine in Roman Catholicism and Anglicanism) who, from 354-430AD, foregrounded the need for Divine aid in order to achieve salvation and emphasised the concept of original sin before abandoning Neo-Platonism completely. For more information and a fuller discussion of the ever-changing concept of the soul in Christian theology see John Rist's *Augustine: Ancient Thought Baptised* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

of being we shall carry, out the pursuits and characteristics of mind which were ours on earth, but all refined and ennobled.¹¹⁰

The link to spiritualism is apparent while the image of the continued existence of the soul is suggestive of both the Christian belief in the immortality of body and soul whilst simultaneously alluding to the Greek school of thought which focuses on dualism: the body dies but the soul remains immortal. Furthermore, in *The Haunted and the Haunters*, the narrator is shown to be aware of the strength of the human soul and the need to resist evil in order to retain the soul's purity for the afterlife. In *The Haunted and the Haunters*, however, the Christian framework is placed side by side with the rational, scientifically explicable element of electricity. The narrative suggests that electricity and unknown scientific forces are somehow involved in the process of the soul moving through different spheres before reaching a Divine status: there is an implication that pseudo-science and the telegraph-like process of mesmerism plays a major role. Surrounded by the inexplicable, immersed in

¹¹⁰ Hills-Johnes, *Dolaucothi*, L8103, p. 5. Lady Hills-Johnes goes into some detail about Bulwer Lytton's emphasis on the subject. She recollects that on speaking of eternal punishment, he stated that "'Eternal does not mean for ever in the words of Scripture, only a very only time. We have no Scriptural authority to show that we shall go at once to Heaven after death. Paradise only means a garden – not Heaven.'" He became so absorbed in his subjects – spiritualism and theology – that when we got back to the boat he forgot to let go the anchor and rowed and rowed without observing that no way was made at all' (p. 5-6). Again, there is an overt indication that the subject of religion and its relationship to the spirit world fascinated Bulwer Lytton. The Pre-Raphaelite follower and Victorian narrative painter, Henry Alexander Bowler displayed his 'The Doubt: Can These Dry Bones Live?' (1855) which draws attention to the Church of England notion that both the body and soul are immortal. Indeed, the butterfly on the human skull is symbolic of the progress of the soul after death. Rick Ryland's *Victorian Psychology and British Culture 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) explores the Victorian preoccupation with the soul and how the 'word psychology is derived from the Greek for "soul discourse". For many at the beginning of the nineteenth century, psychology functionally as well as etymologically, meant simply "the study of the soul"' (p.22). Additionally, Michael Wheeler's *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) focuses on the nineteenth-century preoccupation with the state of the soul after death and the idea of purgatory while *The Study of Literature and Religion: An Introduction*, ed. David Jasper (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989) explores the issue of religion in English literature more generally. With regard to Edward Bulwer Lytton, most critical attention focuses on his portrayal of the soul in his novels, as opposed to his short stories. Gavin Budge's 'Medicine and Mesmerism', explores the connection between mental cultivation and the strength of the soul over the will in *A Strange Story* while Leslie Mitchell's *Bulwer Lytton*, p. 132 focuses more on Bulwer Lytton's idea that the soul is connected to God through electricity, thereby linking religion with science. Allan Conrad Christensen in *The Fiction of New Regions* focuses on how *Godolphin* addresses the issue of transmitting messages from the dead.

mesmerism, chemistry and spiritualism, Bulwer Lytton wrote to his son extensively about his beliefs, suggesting that, while a great deal is shrouded in mystery, '[t]he essential things to hold to [...] [are] God, soul, hereafter, prayer, reverence for, and acceptance of, the hope and ethics of Christianity [...] it is best not to puzzle one's head further'.¹¹¹ Despite this apparent abrupt dismissal of the complexities behind the concept of the soul, it seems that this topic was, nevertheless, one that fascinated and frustrated the author. His works continually allude to its indefinable nature yet, at the same time, he tentatively offers scientific explanations. What lies beneath Bulwer Lytton's deep interest with restless souls and the spiritual afterlife is the need to explore and explain the issue of supernatural forces in a quasi-scientific manner. But the issue of the soul was one that concerned not just Edward Bulwer Lytton but also early-Victorian society in general and, as we shall see in the work of Catherine Crowe, disconcertingly blurs the boundaries between religion, scientific rationality and the supernatural.

¹¹¹ Victor A. G. R. Bulwer Lytton, *The Life*, II. pp. 410-11.

III - Catherine Crowe

(i)

While Bulwer Lytton shrank away from publicly declaring any interest or belief in the complex world of spiritualism and the immortal soul, this was not a problem for many of his female contemporaries such as Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Sophia Frenn De Morgan and, more significantly in the context of my argument, Catherine Crowe.¹¹²

Although Crowe's work has suffered the same fate as Bulwer Lytton and has largely fallen into obscurity today, her allegedly non-fictional *The Night Side of Nature, or, Ghosts and Ghost Seers* (1848) was immensely popular with its contemporary early-Victorian readers.¹¹³ Fusing together elements of Christianity and spiritualism to create what Lucy Sussex terms 'an original, pioneering and clear-eyed investigation of psychic phenomena',¹¹⁴ Crowe produced a highly influential work that directly

¹¹² Even Queen Victoria participated in a spiritualist *séance* conducted by the famous American medium, Georgina Eagle, as early as 1846. See Pearsall *Table Rappers*, p. 36.

¹¹³ A great deal of the criticism on Catherine Crowe tends to focus on her novels as opposed to the collection of supernatural accounts that form *The Night Side of Nature*. For example, Lucy Sussex's 'The Detective Maid-servant: Catherine Crowe's *Susan Hopley*' in *Silent Voice: Forgotten Novels by Victorian Women Writers*, ed. Brenda Ayres (London: Praeger, 2003), pp. 57-66 focuses on her most popular novel to argue that its narrative structure closely resembles modern crime fiction. With regard to Crowe's supernatural writings, however, see G. T. Clapton, 'Baudelaire and Catherine Crowe', *Modern Language Review*, n.s. 100 (2005), pp. 171-90 who discusses Crowe's relationship with, and influence upon, Baudelaire in addition to her explanation of apparitions as a result of the existence of spiritual body. Vanessa D. Dickerson's *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide: Women Writers and the Supernatural* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1996) briefly looks at the way Crowe believed women to be especially open to spiritual knowledge, as does Diana Basham in *The Trial of Women: Feminism and the Occult Sciences in Victorian Literature and Society* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992). Srdjan Smajic's 'The Trouble With Ghost-Seeing: Vision, Ideology and Genre in the Victorian Ghost Story', *ELH: Journal of English Literary History*, n.s. 70:4 (Winter 2003), pp. 1107-36 focuses on the problem of inner and outer vision in spiritualist arguments. Smajic criticises the way in which Catherine Crowe uses empirical observation in *The Night Side of Nature* and her simplistic idea that seeing is believing. Geoffrey Larken has conducted the most research into both the life and works of Catherine Crowe. Not only has he published 'Charlotte Brontë and Catherine Crowe', *Brontë Society Transactions*, n.s. 3:17 (1978), pp. 205-09, which explores the relationship between the two women and their few meetings in London, but his huge collection of notes, manuscripts, articles relating to Catherine Crowe, letters written by or about her and copies of her own published works are held in the Templeton Library at the University of Kent, Canterbury. Although Larken was unable to find a publisher for his 175,000 word biography of Crowe entitled 'The Ghost Fancier – a life of the Victorian Authoress, Mrs. Catherine Crowe', his research and unpublished manuscript is still hugely influential.

¹¹⁴ Lucy Sussex, 'Cherchez Les Femmes: the Lives and Literary Contributions of the First Women to Write Crime Fiction' (Doctoral Thesis, Cardiff University, February 2005), p. 102.

addressed the controversial topic of the supernatural. In contrast to Bulwer Lytton's repeated emphasis on scientific explanation in works such as *The Haunted and Haunters*, Crowe never shied away from exploring the influence of spirits on seemingly inexplicable events: what is often only implicit in Bulwer Lytton's fiction is openly declared in *The Night Side of Nature*. Building upon her 1845 translation of what Crowe terms the 'curious work'¹¹⁵ of Justinus Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst* – an account of a Bavarian peasant woman's clairvoyant visions whilst in a magnetic trance which allowed her to contact the different spheres of the spirit world – which *John Bull* described as 'singular' and 'curious',¹¹⁶ Crowe published her own collection of what she believed to be true accounts of apparitions, clairvoyance, poltergeists, haunting spirits and trance-like dreams of ghosts, a collection that Adeline Sergeant describes as 'the best storehouse of ghost stories in the English language'.¹¹⁷ Significantly, as Joanne Wilkes points out, this 'became Crowe's most popular work, running into many editions up to 1904', while '[u]nderpinning the stories, however, was Crowe's strong conviction that her contemporaries needed to be receptive to evidence of a spiritual dimension in nature'.¹¹⁸ Importantly, Crowe wanted to raise awareness of the supernatural, challenging dogmatic materialist ideologies and foregrounding the importance of the progress of the soul after death.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Justinus Kerner, *The Seeress of Prevorst, Being Revelations Concerning the Inner-Life of Man*, trans. by Catherine Crowe (New York: Harper Brothers, 1845), p.3. For more information on Catherine Crowe and *The Seeress of Prevorst* see, Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts*, pp. 31-33.

¹¹⁶ Anon., 'The Seeress of Prevorst: Being Revelations Concerning the Inner-Life of Man, and the Inter-Diffusion of a World of Spirits in the One we Inhabit. Communicated by Justinus Kerner, Chief Physician at Weinsberg. From the German. By Mrs. Crowe' in *John Bull*, 7 June 1845, p. 278.

¹¹⁷ Adeline Sergeant, *Mrs Crowe. Mrs Archer Clive. Mrs Henry: Women Novelists of Queen Victoria's Reign* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1897), p. 152.

¹¹⁸ Joanne Wilkes, 'Crowe, Catherine Ann (1790-1872)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6822> [accessed 20 November 2007].

¹¹⁹ As Adeline Sergeant points out in *Mrs Crowe. Mrs Archer Clive*, however, 'Mrs. Crowe was extremely versatile; she wrote plays, children's stories, short historical tales, romantic novels, as well as the ghost stories with which her name seems chiefly to be associated in the minds of this generation' (p. 150).

Again, it is Lucy Sussex who draws attention to its influence on contemporary society:

The Night Side of Nature was highly influential, being read avidly and widely. It was cited [...] in the celebrated ghost story "What Was It?" (1859) by the Irish-American writer Fitzjames O'Brien [...] [and is] still regarded as an important text by Spiritualists.¹²⁰

Moreover, it is significant that the popularity of *The Night Side of Nature* emphasises that early-Victorian readers were interested in Crowe's discussion of ghosts: her success suggests that contemporary society was eager to learn more directly about these controversial supernatural issues to which other authors, like Bulwer Lytton, were only prepared to allude.

Importantly, it was not only the general reading public who helped make *The Night Side of Nature* a success: praise from contemporary critics also worked to transform Crowe's collection of chapters on troubled spirits, wraiths, second sight and spectral lights into an early-Victorian favourite. No-one was more generous in their praise than Charles Dickens who, when reviewing the text for the *Examiner* newspaper, commented that '[t]he authoress of *Susan Hopley* and *Lily Dawson* has established her title [...] She can never be read without pleasure and profit, and can never write otherwise than sensibly and well',¹²¹ before moving on to declare that her

¹²⁰ Sussex, 'The Detective Maidservant' in *Silent Voice*, pp. 57-66 (p. 60).

¹²¹ Charles Dickens, *Examiner*, 26 February 1848, p. 131. John M. L. Drew in *Dickens the Journalist* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), p. 103 has commented that '[t]wo lengthy reviews of 1848 give some indication of Dickens's interest in both natural and supernatural 'science'. His remarks on Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* evince a working knowledge of both contemporary and historical theories on the spirit world, and psychic phenomena.' Additionally, Philip Collins in his essay entitled 'Dickens on Ghosts: An Uncollected Article', *Dickensian*, n.s. 59 (1963), pp. 5-14, reprints what he terms a 'lengthy and hitherto unidentified piece by him [Dickens] on the subject [of ghosts]' (p. 1) which is, in fact, Dickens's review of Crowe's work in the *Examiner* (26 February 1848). Collins emphasises how Dickens's review reveals that his 'fascination with this topic was tempered by a strong scepticism' (p. 1). This emphasis on Dickens's interest in the spirit world and, in particular, Catherine Crowe's ghost accounts, is something that Dickens himself drew attention to in a letter of 25 November 1851 to Elizabeth Gaskell, when he jokingly refers to the issue by saying that 'Crows have plucked at the fleeces of other Ghosts of mine before now – but I have borne it meekly' which, as is noted in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Nina Burgis (Oxford:

work is 'one of the most extraordinary collections of 'Ghost Stories' that has ever been published'.¹²² It is further significant that Dickens thought highly enough of Crowe to publish her work in his periodical *Household Words* and include her in his personal social circle.¹²³ Writing to A. H. Layard in 1851, Dickens tells his correspondent that 'Mary Barton and Susan Hopley – two ladies whom you may have met in print – are going to dine with us on Tuesday'.¹²⁴ Classed alongside respected novelists such as Elizabeth Gaskell, the authoress of *Susan Hopley* was certainly in demand: often regarded as one of the first female crime fiction novelists, a children's author, journalist and writer on the supernatural, Catherine Crowe was a undoubtedly a multi-talented woman. Born Catherine Ann Stevens at Borough Green in Kent in 1790, she started her literary career relatively late. After an unhappy marriage to Major John Crowe, which produced a son named John William Crowe in 1823, she decided to separate from her husband in 1837 and pursue a new life in Edinburgh. Surrounded by friends, including Thomas De Quincey, William M. Thackeray and Harriet Martineau, she was encouraged to write for periodicals such as *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in addition to publishing her own fiction. Nevertheless, as Richard Garnett notes, 'Mrs. Crowe will probably be best remembered by her *Night Side of Nature*'¹²⁵ which is classed as 'one of the best collection of supernatural stories in our language [...] [as] the energy of the authoress's own belief [...] [lends] animation to her narrative'.¹²⁶ Indeed, its influence

Clarendon, 1988), VI, p. 546, is almost certainly a reference to Catherine Crowe's supernatural works. Section three of Chapter One will explore the issue of Dickens and the supernatural in greater detail.

¹²² Dickens, *Examiner*, 26 February 1848, p. 131.

¹²³ Catherine Crowe contributed a number of short stories to Dickens's periodical such as *The Loaded Dice* which was published in the fourth number of *Household Words* as well as *The Young Advocate* (published 22 June 1850) and *Esther Hammond's Wedding Day* (published 24 January 1852).

¹²⁴ Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, Nina Burgis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), VI, p. 564.

¹²⁵ Richard Garnett, *Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (London: Oxford University Press, 1921-22), V, p. 237.

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 237.

is unchallenged, but what is most relevant is the way Crowe's belief in the spirit world is reflected in the accounts she painstakingly documents: her attachment to spiritualism, however, is something that would prove to be both the making of her literary career and the cause of her subsequent downfall.

In a similar fashion to mesmerism, spiritualism was a phenomenon that, in the nineteenth century, was met with equal amounts of both praise and censure.¹²⁷ Perhaps no-one was more intensely influenced by spiritualism than Catherine Crowe who had already worked alongside the acclaimed Edinburgh phrenologist, George Coombs, and whose personal belief in the spirit world resulted in a number of literary works including not only *The Night Side of Nature* but also the later publication of *Light or Darkness: Or, Mysteries of Life* (1850) – which the critic from *John Bull* predicted would ‘excite [...] the lovers of the marvellous’¹²⁸ – *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In* (1859) and *Ghosts and Family Legends: A Volume for Christmas* (1859). By contrast to Madame Home's criticism that Edward Bulwer Lytton was ‘[i]n public [...] an investigator of Spiritualism, in private a believer’,¹²⁹ Crowe was not only a self-confessed believer and ‘pioneer in the field of parapsychology’¹³⁰ but was also, most importantly, taken seriously by the contemporary Victorian society. As Dickens's glowing review suggested, *The Night Side of Nature* was a work that wanted ‘to induce people to inquire into such stories and reflect upon them, instead of laughing at them and dismissing them’.¹³¹ In effect, therefore, Crowe's research into

¹²⁷ Antonio Melechi in *Servants of the Supernatural: The Night Side of Victorian Nature* (London: William Heinemann, 2008) uses Crowe's work to emphasise how the Victorian craze for mesmerism paved the way for the later spiritualist movement.

¹²⁸ Anon., ‘A New Work from the Pen of Mrs. Crowe, the Author of *The Night Side of Nature*, Lilly Dawson &c., has Just Made its Appearance’, *John Bull*, 5 October 1850, p. 632.

¹²⁹ Mme. Home, *Life and Mission*, p. 178.

¹³⁰ Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts*, p. 31.

¹³¹ Dickens, *Examiner*, 26 Feb 1848, p. 131.

psychic phenomena – at least in the early stages of her career before her mental breakdown – did not jeopardise her status as an influential and respectable authoress.

But things were to fall apart for Catherine Crowe in spectacular style. Despite working to distinguish herself as a respected novelist and writer of the supernatural, her erratic personal behaviour soon resulted in even her closest literary acquaintances becoming her most ruthless critics: ‘Spiritualist fever’, which was sweeping across England, the Continent and America, would be Crowe’s undoing. In February 1854, and while in the process of collecting material for another collection of supernatural tales, Crowe spent a night in a famous haunted house in Edinburgh attempting to communicate with its restless spirits and gather empirical evidence of the spirit world. Whatever happened that night is something of a mystery, but Crowe’s conduct after this event was, as Sussex states, ‘reported gleefully and widely [...] in the newspapers, anti-spiritualist magazines and by sundry literary gossips’¹³² across the country. In a letter dated 22 April 1855 Robert Bulwer Lytton, son of Edward Bulwer Lytton, wrote to Elizabeth Barrett Browning¹³³ from Florence to notify her of Catherine Crowe’s behaviour:

Of Mrs Crowe, the story, as I have heard it, is: that she appeared in the streets of London, in a state of absolute nakedness, terribly set off by a fan which she held in one hand, and a cardcase in the other [...] she informed the upbraiding

¹³² Lucy Sussex, *Cherchez Les Femmes*, p. 103.

¹³³ Robert Bulwer Lytton is writing to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, a self-proclaimed spiritualist who respected Catherine Crowe and her work. In an earlier letter of 7 January 1853, to Lady Elgin, Barrett Browning commented that ‘our first invitation to London [...] was to see Lord Stanhope’s crystal ball – which in justice I must say, was by no means a satisfactory exhibition. Lord Stanhope assured me that “twenty spirits had been seen in it, of whom three were females.” [...] I understand that even Mrs. Crowe, the author of “The Night Side of Nature” suspects a good deal of moral twilight in the seer employed by Lord Stanhope to see the crystalline vision’. See, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Texas, University of Baylor, Browning Database, 53021. Moreover, writing to Miss E. F. Haworth in June 1853 on the subject of spiritualism in Florence she comments that ‘[e]ven here, from the priest to the Mazzinian, they are making circles [...] Now mind you tell me whatever you hear and see. How does Mrs Crowe decide? By the way, I was glad to observe by the papers that she had a dramatic success’. See, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, ed. F.G. Kenyon (Smith, Elder and Co: London, 1897), II, p. 120.

magistrate before whom they [the Police] brought her, that this singularity of costume had been adopted in consequence of certain distinct assurances received from “the Spirits” that the arrangement of the Fan and Cardcase [...] would [...] result in complete invisibility [...] Mrs Crowe, I understand, attributed the failure of the experiment to a mistake in the arrangement of the Fan and card-case.¹³⁴

Although Robert Bulwer Lytton inaccurately locates Crowe’s naked appearance in Mayfair, as opposed to Edinburgh, his account of what actually happened seems to be accurate: Crowe’s brief mental breakdown and display of public nudity forced her to spend time in Hanwell Asylum and temporarily cease writing. Robert Bulwer Lytton’s comic view of the incident is tame when compared to other contemporary accounts. For example, Bryan Waller Procter tells Robert Browning – one of spiritualism’s most ardent sceptics and author of the satirical poem *Mr. Sludge the Medium* – in a letter dated 13 March 1854 that ‘[y]ou will not be surprised to hear that the charlatanrie of table-turning has driven poor Mrs. Crowe – *mad*. I heard yesterday that she was not likely to live’.¹³⁵ The cruellest comments, however, were reserved for Catherine Crowe’s acquaintance and previous admirer of her work, Charles Dickens. Writing to the Rev. James While on 7 March 1854, Dickens states that ‘Mrs [Crowe] has gone stark mad – and stark naked on the spirit-rapping imposition. [...] She is now in a mad-house, and, I fear, hopelessly insane’¹³⁶ before commenting in another letter to Emile de la Rue, dated the following day, that ‘[t]he spirit-rapping rottenness is fading away, after having done a world of harm [...] Mrs Crowe [...] who wrote a book called *The Night side of Nature* [...] was a medium, and an Ass, and I don’t

¹³⁴ Robert Bulwer Lytton, Texas, University of Baylor, *The Browning Database* 54063.

¹³⁵ Richard Willard Armour, *Barry Cornwall: A Biography of Bryan Waller Procter* (Meador: Boston, 1935), p. 235. See Katherine H. Porter’s *Through a Glass Darkly: Spiritualism in the Browning Circle* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1958) for more information on Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning’s relationship with the supernatural.

¹³⁶ Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds., Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, Angus Easson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), VII, p. 285-86.

know what else [...] She is now under restraint of course'.¹³⁷ In the face of such humiliation, Crowe's reputation was inevitably tainted. Although she returned to London society after her breakdown, her health never fully recovered and her literary output declined.

Despite such a dramatic and public fall from grace, Catherine Crowe nevertheless produced work addressing the issue of spiritualism in the years post-breakdown. Almost half a decade after her 1854 naked run through the streets of Edinburgh, *Spiritualism and the Age We Live In* (1859) – an account of Spiritualism as 'God's whisperings'¹³⁸ – and *Ghosts and Family Legends* (1859) were published, while *The Night Side of Nature* continued to run into further editions. It seems that Crowe's lapse into insanity did not substantially damage her sales: she remained something of an authority on the spirit world and popular Victorian pseudo-sciences such as mesmerism and phrenology for a period after 1854.¹³⁹ But what is most significant in the context of this thesis, however, is the fact that *The Night Side of Nature* was written and published pre-1854. Regardless of her disastrous later relationship with spiritualism, *The Night Side of Nature* was a literary triumph and a success for the early spiritualist movement in England. Although Catherine Crowe was not a medium and never claimed to have seen a ghost herself, her unyielding belief in a spiritualism, which comfortably coexisted with her Church of England faith, seemed to be exactly what early-Victorian society craved, even if – like Edward Bulwer Lytton – it would not fully admit it.

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 288.

¹³⁸ Catherine Crowe, *Spiritualism and the Age we Live in* (London: Newby, 1859), p. 8.

¹³⁹ Catherine Crowe was a follower of the famous Edinburgh phrenologist George Combe whose influential work on the subject ran into numerous editions. In *A System of Phrenology* (Edinburgh: Maclachlan, 1843), I, Combe describes phrenology as being 'not an *exact*, but an *estimative* science [...] a branch of physiology' which 'like medical science, rests on evidence which can be observed and *estimated* only' (p. vii).

(ii)

Regardless of the conflict of opinion which spiritualism inevitably engendered, early Victorian society remained open to the investigation and retained an interest in psychic exploration. Indeed, this thesis argues that Crowe's quasi-scientific investigation into what she believed to be the real world of spirits feeds directly into her work, implying that her exploration of apparent supernatural forces works in tandem with contemporary scientific discoveries. Taking advantage of this desire to explore and examine, Catherine Crowe uses the introductory chapter of *The Night Side of Nature* to declare that '[t]he contemptuous scepticism of the last age is yielding to a more humble spirit of inquiry'¹⁴⁰ before stating that 'there is a large class of persons amongst the enlightened of the present, who [...] believe that much of what they had been taught to reject as fable, has been, in reality, ill-understood truth'. She thus self-consciously sets up her position as both a believer in and surveyor of the spirit world. Carefully using empirical evidence of 'the most remarkable cases of haunting in modern times' (p. 105), Crowe cleverly locates her argument in the present context, using examples from the early 1840s in order to demonstrate that such events can exist in a 'rationalistic age' (p. 56). Significantly, this text blurs the divide between empirical evidence, rational thinking, scientific explanation and spirituality to produce a sophisticated investigation into the unknown. But *The Night Side of Nature* seems to operate at two levels: at one level it is a complex analysis of spiritualism and unexplored phenomena. But Crowe's insistence on drawing upon the Scriptures and the Christian notion of the soul prevents the text from becoming a

¹⁴⁰ Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature, or, Ghosts and Ghost Seers* (Montana: Kessinger, 2003), p. 5. All further references to *The Night Side of Nature* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the body of the thesis.

wholly scientific investigation into the supernatural: her explanation of ghostly happenings has more of a religious, as opposed to supernatural, framework.

The idea of the soul was a doctrine that tenaciously and persistently haunted the Victorian imagination. Enlarging on Edward Bulwer Lytton's interest in the immortality of both body and soul, Catherine Crowe argued that:

The Scriptures seem to indicate [...] that the spirit that dwells within us is the spirit of God, incorporating in us for a period, for certain ends of His own [...] The soul is subject to the spirit; and its functions are, *to will, or choose, to think, and to feel* [...] The *Ego*, or *I*, is the resultant of the three forces [...] spirit, soul and body. (p. 9)

The emphasis upon man as a 'tripartite being' (p. 9) is overt: the Christian notion of the immortal body and soul is reiterated by Crowe's insistence on the spirit of God as a third powerful element in this equation.¹⁴¹ Moreover, with regard to her overall argument, the soul plays a key role: *The Night Side of Nature* offers a theory suggesting that ghostly apparitions are simply souls which are somehow trapped on earth. Directly relating to the apparent Victorian preoccupation with the progress of the human soul after death, Crowe goes on to cite Saint Martin, who 'did not believe that spirits who had once quitted the earth returned to it, but he believed that some did not quit it' (p. 69). Crowe dismisses any occult or supernatural reason, choosing instead to appeal to the authority of a Christian saint and offer an unmistakably religious explanation. After establishing this theory – and reproducing numerous examples of ghostly sightings of souls trapped on this earth without an earthly body – she continues with yet another link to the Scriptures. Discussing sin and the Christian pathway to salvation, she suggests that 'the language of Scriptures, which speaks of

¹⁴¹ Crowe's reference to 'the Ego, or I' (p. 9) seems to foreshadow the early-twentieth psychoanalytical work of Sigmund Freud who stated that the human mind was divided into different mental agencies: the ego, the id and the superego. For a discussion of this aspect of Freud's research see, for example, Frank J. Sulloway's *Freud, Biologist of the Mind: Beyond the Psychoanalytic Legend* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

sin as a bondage, is not only metaphorically, but literally true' (p. 25): for Crowe, sin binds the soul to the earth indefinitely in a purgatorial existence. Although *The Night Side of Nature* does not, in effect, offer any radically new explanation of ghostly apparitions, what is important is the religious dimension. Crowe's emphasis on God is central to the text, locating both spiritualism and spirituality in a firmly Christian context.

Paralleling *Zanoni*'s presentation of prophetic dream states, *The Night Side of Nature* directly addresses the issue of dreaming but from a very different perspective. By contrast to Bulwer Lytton's depiction of Zanoni and Viola communicating via sleeping trances, Crowe does not hide behind the cloak of fiction. Once again this unconventional authoress chooses to stress the religious nature of dreaming, explaining that:

[t]he Scriptures teach us that God chose to reveal Himself to His people chiefly in dreams, and we are entitled to conclude that the reason of this was, that the spirit was then more free to the reception of spiritual influences and impressions; and the class of dreams to which I next proceed seem to be best explained by this hypothesis. (p. 33)

The language emphasises that the spirit transmits both godly and mortal messages to the body via dreams. There is no supernatural explanation offered, as Crowe uses a strictly religious concept to justify the numerous examples of what she believes to be real-life dream messages. Moving on from this emphasis on the Christian notion of dreaming, the text further suggests that 'spirits appearing like angels, with wings [...] drawn from those relations in the Bible, when messengers were sent from God to man' (p. 70) before making it clear that the visions are 'departed spirits' [...] 'not angels, though probably destined in the course of ages to become so' (p. 70). Crowe's faith in the teachings of the Bible and the words of Christian saints seem to be the

force behind her research into ghostly apparitions. She dedicates an entire chapter, 'Apparitions Seeking the Prayers of the Living', to the famous case – previously discussed in her translation of *The Seeress of Prevorst* (1845) – of Rosina Schahl, who was haunted by a ghost which required her prayers to obtain its release: 'he [the ghost] [...] takes her hands and lays them together, to make her pray. He sighs and groans like a person in despair [...] Whilst he is making these sounds she is often praying' (p. 121). Again there is an implication that the apparition is trapped in a purgatorial continuation. Embodying the Catholic doctrine that the soul needs the prayers of the living to aid its passage through purgatory into Heaven, this soul is bound to earth and desperately needs the living woman to release him: her prayers are the only means by which God may grant him freedom.¹⁴² There is a sense that the early spiritualist insistence on the different spheres of the spirit world builds directly on extant orthodox Christian views of purgatory and the progress of the human soul.

To a great extent, the spiritualist elements of *The Night Side of Nature* are firmly rooted in Christian doctrine.¹⁴³ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the text's discussion of the complex structure of the spirit domain and the way in which mankind is 'surrounded by a world of spirits' (p. 10) which is, as Crowe explains, often 'inter-diffused amongst us' (p. 10). Building upon the spiritualist belief in protective spirits, the text argues that the 'doctrine of guardian spirits – a doctrine which has prevailed, more or less, in all ages [...] has been considered by many theologians to be supported by the Bible' (p. 25). There is a suggestion that the early-Victorian phenomenon of spiritualism is, in fact, very much a branch of Christianity:

¹⁴² For more information on the representation of purgatory in literature see Stephen Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

¹⁴³ For more information on the way in which spiritualism moves away from its initial classification as a parlour pastime to a religious movement see Pearsall's *Table Rappers*, pp. 29-34.

Crowe foregrounds the religious nature of the movement and its adherence to the will of God. The idea of a guardian angel is just one example of how the teaching of the Gospels is incorporated in this new religion.¹⁴⁴ Spiritualism offers a new discourse: it draws on aspects of Christianity to explain how seemingly supernatural events can have a rational explanation when analysed with reference to the Bible.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, whilst the intended emphasis might fall on the religious aspects of Crowe's ghostly investigations, there is a subtext focussed on the juxtaposition of Christianity and Victorian science. This becomes clear in the way in which Crowe subtly links spirituality with unexplained scientific phenomena to offer what is tantamount to a rational explanation of spirit manifestations.

Early-Victorian England is often presented as a society that, as Vanessa D. Dickerson notes, was preoccupied by the supernaturalism which 'the age craved but science discredited'.¹⁴⁶ This tension between science and the unknown is something that Catherine Crowe repeatedly attempts to re-address. Henry Spicer, in his 1853 research into spiritualism, cites Crowe's work:

"The Philosophers of our schools do not" writes Mrs. Crowe, "quarrel with a new metal, or a new plant; and even a new comet, or a new island, stands a fair chance of being well received; while phrenology and mesmerism testify that any discovery tending to throw light on what most deeply concerns us, namely, our own being, must be prepared to encounter a storm of angry persecution."¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ Vanessa D. Dickerson in *Ghosts in the Noontide*, discusses Catherine Crowe's translation of Justinus Kerner's *The Seeress of Prevorst* and, significantly, comments on the 'mesmeric trances during which the seer conversed with her guardian spirit' (p. 31), suggesting that mesmerism, spiritual spheres and Christianity are all interconnected.

¹⁴⁵ Horace Bushnell draws attention to this issue in his work, *Nature and the Supernatural as Together Constituting the One System of God* (New York: AMS Press, 1973) stating that 'the magnetists or seers of electricity, opening other spheres and conditions of being by electric impacts, and preparing a religion out of the revelations of natural clairvoyance [...] [are connected to] the Christian supernaturalism, or the plan of redemption by Christ, that they have been so mightily illuminated by' (p. 25).

¹⁴⁶ Dickerson, *Victorian Ghosts*, p. 31.

¹⁴⁷ Henry Spicer, *Sights and Sounds: The Mystery of the Day: Comprising An Entire History of the American Spirit Manifestations* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1853), pp. 7-8.

Moreover, in the preface to the 1848 first edition of *The Night Side of Nature*, the author makes clear her views that ‘science in this country, has put aside it [unexplained ghostly happenings] as beneath her notice, because new facts that do not fit into old theories are troublesome’.¹⁴⁸ It is this fraught relationship between spirit manifestation, science and Church of England doctrine which continues to unsettle the text. Indeed, this problem was something that Crowe was not afraid to address in both the preface and the body of the text itself: ‘I do not propose to consider them [ghosts] as supernatural; on the contrary, I am persuaded that the time will come when they will be reduced strictly within the bounds of science’ (p. 8).¹⁴⁹ Directly challenging the masculine world of science, Crowe foregrounds not only the narrow-mindedness of the discipline but also her belief that ghosts cannot be dismissed as imaginary products of diseased minds. Her insistence on a mixture of scientific rationality and Christian faith makes *The Night Side of Nature* both distinctive and unconventional. When discussing her own role in an experiment during which she inhaled sulphuric ether and witnessed a ‘heavenly light’ (p. 113), she explains that:

Of what nature this heavenly light was, and I cannot forbear calling it *heavenly*, for it was like nothing on earth – I know not, nor how far it may be related to those luminous emanations occasionally seen around ecstasies, saints, [and] martyrs [...] we have no reason to be amazed at the presence of luminous emanations [...] as we are the subject of various electrical phenomena, nobody is surprised when, on combing their hair or pulling off their silk stockings, they hear a crackling noise or even see sparks. (p. 113)

When placed in a scientific framework – as Crowe seems to be doing with reference to her ‘experiment’ with ether – the language evokes images of the contemporary research by Michael Faraday into electricity and, more specifically, the electric

¹⁴⁸ Catherine Crowe, *The Night Side of Nature; or, Ghosts and Ghost Seers* (London: Newby, 1848), II, p. vi.

¹⁴⁹ This was a position taken by many influential Victorians such as Thomas Arnold who also believed, as Ronald Pearsall states in *Table Rappers*, p. 68, that the phenomena of spiritualism should not be classified as supernatural.

light.¹⁵⁰ But there is a difference. Crowe's insistence that the light is 'heavenly' works to juxtapose science and religion. There is an implication that Crowe resists a straightforward interpretation of events by deliberately combining polar opposites. An additional twist to her account is the reference to the light associated with martyrs and saints which is something that she returns to later in the text. As she discusses the 'influence of magnetism' (p. 18) on both contemporary life and the medical profession, Crowe significantly relates this light to the 'saints who suffered the most appalling tortures, and slept or smiled the while, can scarcely be rejected now, when [...] people [are] undergoing frightful operations in a state of insensibility' (p. 18). It seems, according to Crowe, that the magnetism used by the early-Victorians as a form of pain relief finds its origins in early Christianity.¹⁵¹ Although religious discourses do not define saintly ability to endure torture as magnetism, Crowe suggests that this Victorian phenomenon can, in fact, be linked to Christianity: essentially, a new way of thinking about science was foregrounded by this popular author.

Pseudo-sciences such as animal magnetism were an influential part of early-Victorian society. Even though – similarly to Edward Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni* (1846) – Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* was published after the fraudulent O'Key sisters had discredited mesmerism as a serious medical practice, it continued to have an impact on contemporary society and is often reflected in the literature of the period. This is evident in Crowe's continued juxtaposition of magnetism with

¹⁵⁰ For more information on Victorian attitudes to the discovery of ether, see Bruce J. Hunt's 'Lines of Force, Swirls of Ether' in *From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art and Literature*, eds., Bruce Clarke and Linda Dalrymple Henderson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 99-113. Much research has been undertaken into the influence of electricity on Victorian society and how this discovery is reflected in the literature of the period. Additionally, its role in the animal magnetism, or mesmerism, phenomena has also been extensively explored, see Alison Winter's *Mesmerised*, pp. 276-96.

¹⁵¹ For more information on the Victorian practice of using magnetism (or mesmerism) as a way of pain relief in operations, child birth and undefined illnesses see, Alison Winters *Mesmerised*, p. 212.

religion. Her belief that the departed soul moves onto different spheres in the spirit world and that 'Heaven and Hell are not *places*; they are states' (p. 74) led her to the theorise that:

Dismissing the idea, therefore, that Heaven and Hell are places in which the soul is imprisoned, whether in bliss or woe, and, supposing that, by a magnetic relation, it may remain connected with the sphere to which it previously belonged, we may easily conceive that [...] it will cling to the scene of its former joys. (p. 78)

This explanation of why a ghostly spirit may linger on earth controversially places the language of magnetism in a both a religious and biblical framework. Crowe's rejection of Heaven and Hell as material spaces, however, reveals that her belief in Christianity was not dogmatic: she rejects the traditional Church doctrine that the afterlife is either a literal place of eternal damnation or paradise, suggesting instead that the soul remains trapped in a magnetic state. Catherine Crowe's emphasis on a 'magnetic relation' reveals her belief that science, albeit pseudo-science, can explain ghostly apparitions. Nevertheless, regardless of her somewhat contentious mixture of religion and science what remains significant is Crowe's rejection of the supernatural: surprisingly, *The Night Side of Nature* proves to be a collection of ghostly narratives which do not satisfy the early-Victorian thirst for the paranormal, frequently addressed in short stories. The rational world of science, as opposed to the miraculous, seems to be the explanation on offer.

The most obvious use of this scientific discipline is Catherine Crowe's method of collecting the strange stories which comprise *The Night Side of Nature*. Her technique of using empirical observation or 'scientism' is suggestive of a scientific methodology, echoing the medical professions' insistence on close observation whilst collecting data. Frequently, therefore, the boundaries between medicine, religion and

the unexplained are permeable. For example, when discussing catalepsy – in which a person spontaneously enters a trance state – Crowe again relies upon a scientific discourse to comprehend the condition:

There have been persons who [...] possess a power which they could exert at will, whereby they withdrew from their bodies, these remaining during the absence of the spirit in a state of catalepsy, scarcely, if at all, to be distinguished from death [...] Colonel Townsend [...] performed the experiment in the presence of three medical men, one of whom kept his hand on his heart, another held his wrist, and the third placed a looking-glass before his lips. (p. 42)

This idea of the spirit temporarily leaving the body conforms to the Christian notion of the tripartite being incorporating the spirit, soul and body – something Catherine Crowe affirms in the early stages of *The Night Side of Nature*. Yet, any religious connotations are soon undermined by the scientific elements which shape the account: it is significant that doctors and not clergymen are called upon to help unravel the mysterious trance, while the vocabulary emphasises that the cataleptic sufferer has become a part of a medical experiment. Science is presented as key to understanding this mental state. Additionally, Crowe manipulates the scientific framework in an attempt to eradicate what she terms ‘dark ignorance and superstitious folly’ (p. 39). During her discussion of corpse lights and reported ‘supernatural appearances’ (p. 38) of ghosts in dark graveyards Crowe positions herself as a rational thinker, explaining that ‘in such cases there must be a very slow and long continued chemical action’ (p. 38) in which the body naturally disintegrates to create the mysterious vapours which are perceived as supernatural spirits. After going into some detail about the chemical process involved, Crowe concludes by saying that ‘[m]any ghost stories will now find their natural explanation’ (p. 39). Unlike Bulwer Lytton’s half-hearted attempt at pseudo-scientific reasoning in *The Haunted and the Haunters*, therefore, Catherine Crowe explicitly makes science the focus in her investigations: surprisingly, it is

Crowe's rationalisation of the supernatural – which Victorian society seemed fascinated by – and her unique blend of Christianity that made *The Night Side of Nature* a popular read.

More is involved, inevitably, than a simple scientific methodology. Although Crowe's merging of Christianity and science proves to be the drive behind her research, there is, nevertheless, a subtle feeling of inconsistency in Crowe's argument. At times the text, albeit obliquely, hints that science is not omniscient. Commenting on why spirits will not appear during a spiritualist *séance*, the authoress admits that 'I can bring forward no evidence that will satisfy a scientific mind: but neither are my opponents a whit better fortified' (p. 77). This honest acknowledgement reveals a weakness in Crowe's argument: there are some things that elude both science and religion. Again, in her discussion of the German philosophers whom she so ardently respected and admired, Crowe confesses that certain aspects of the inexplicable remain elusive to even them: 'Dr. Sicherer [...] examined everything; and [...] could [...] [not] find [...] any clue to the mystery, which, in a scientific point of view, appeared to him utterly inexplicable' (p. 124). While the main body of *The Night Side of Nature* is a well-constructed and researched argument into the rational elements of seemingly irrational events, there remains a sense of unease. Even Catherine Crowe, one of the most passionate believers in spiritualism and supporter of scientific investigation, is shown to falter: science can not be relied upon to explain everything. While the intended emphasis might fall on the interchangeability between rational thinking and religious faith, the reality is the exposure of what remains unsolved. What lies beneath, therefore, is a deep fascination with spiritual phenomena which is explored in a quasi-scientific manner. But Crowe's fixed adherence to the

spiritualist movement seems to prevent her from becoming an impartial scientific investigator. By contrast, however, Charles Dickens has a different perspective. As I shall argue in the next section of this chapter, his position as a Victorian realist author and journalist distances him from psychic research, helping to shape his scepticism about spiritualism. Ultimately, Dickens deliberately uses the discourse of the supernatural to entertain his readers without really subscribing to or believing in it.

Zanoni's liminal position between immortal magician and powerful scientist shifts as his relationship with Viola deepens. As the novel progresses – and Zanoni's connection with the marginal, albeit Christian, Brotherhood weakens – a more intensely spiritual side to his character develops, an aspect that is repeatedly connected with Christ-like imagery:

‘Sometimes I have seen thee in my dreams surrounded by shapes of glory and light; thy looks radiant with a celestial joy [...] Stranger thou hast saved me, and I thank and bless thee’ [...] with these words she crossed her arms meekly on her bosom, and inclined lowly before him. (p. 97)

Viola's tone, actions and use of language consciously allude to biblical images associated with Jesus: dreams commonly occur throughout the Old and New Testament as a way of communicating God's wishes to earthbound mortals.⁶⁴ In the Gospel of Matthew the three Magi, who travel to visit the newborn Jesus at Bethlehem, are warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod and, as a result, depart on another safe route home.⁶⁵ This same Gospel then continues to describe how an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream, telling him to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus and escape the jealous wrath of King Herod.⁶⁶ While these are just two examples from a single Book of the Bible – perhaps the best-known occurrence of a biblical dream is Joseph and his coat of many colours from the Book of Genesis⁶⁷ – they nevertheless reiterate the point that dream-messages are an intricate part of the biblical framework and are often a technique used to protect individuals from

⁶⁴ While I am aware that a great deal of psychoanalytical research has been undertaken into dreams and their complex meaning, this is not the focus of my interest. I only cite the various biblical references to dreams without going into depth about the psychology behind them. For more information on biblical dreams see Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, trans Jill Munro (Sheffield: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1999).

⁶⁵ ‘The New Testament’ in *The Revised English Bible*, ed. Donald Coggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 2. All further references to the New Testament of the Bible are to this edition and given parenthetically in the body of the thesis.

⁶⁶ ‘New Testament’, *English Bible*, p. 2.

⁶⁷ ‘The Old Testament’ in *The Revised English Bible*, ed. Donald Coggan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 31. All further references to the Old Testament of the Bible are to this edition and given parenthetically in the body of the thesis.

unforeseen dangers. Moreover, with regard to Bulwer Lytton's text, Viola not only views Zanoni as her saviour, but reinforces his almost divine presence by speaking of the man's 'celestial joy' (p. 97): she is both humbled and in awe of him.⁶⁸

But it is not only prophetic dreams which position Zanoni alongside Heavenly imagery. Often his behaviour seems consciously to echo that of Jesus; parallels can be drawn between Christ's crucifixion, in which he sacrificed himself for mankind, and Zanoni's decision to forfeit his immortality by exchanging places with Viola and dying on the guillotine.⁶⁹ Furthermore, Zanoni also surrenders his life in order to protect his wife and child from another evil in the shape of the haunting Dweller of the Threshold who has already plagued the anguished Glyndon. In events leading up to Zanoni's death, this demonic spirit taunts him:

Ha! ha! – thou canst save her life, if thou wilt sacrifice thine own! Is it for this thou hast lived on through crumbling empires and countless generations of thy race? At last shall Death reclaim thee? Wouldst thou save her? – *die for her!* [...] Silent! Art thou ready for the sacrifice? (p. 427)

⁶⁸ Zanoni as a saviour-figure has been somewhat overlooked in literary criticism. However, Sondra Ford Swift's essay 'Toward the Vampire as Saviour: Chelsea Quinn Yarbro's *Saint-Germain* Series Compared with Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni*' in *The Blood is Life: Vampires in Literature*, ed. Leonard G. Heldreth and Mary Pharr (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999), pp. 155-64 argue that Zanoni is a true saviour but not in a biblical sense. The critic explores the idea that Zanoni's immortality and mysterious power make him almost vampire-like before arguing that the vampire can be a sympathetic character.

⁶⁹ It is interesting that Zanoni's actions have historical parallels. During the French Revolution a young French girl named Madeleine de Coigny exchanged places with a prisoner so that she could die alongside her lover Andreas Chénier. This was a relatively well-known tale during the Victorian period and was even adapted by Umberto Giordano into an Opera in four Acts entitled 'Andreas Chénier' (1896). For more information on this Opera see: John Marrack and Ewan West, 'Andrea Chénier', *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t77.e129> [accessed 9 January 2008]. There are also echoes of this tale in Charles Dickens's 1859 novel *A Tale of Two Cities*. Andrew Sanders, in '"Cartloads of Books": Some Sources for *A Tale of Two Cities*' in *Dickens and Other Victorians: Essays in Honour of Phillip Collins*, ed. Joanne Shattock (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 37-52 explores the direct influences on Dickens's plot but focuses primarily on Wilkie Collins's drama *The Frozen Deep* and Thomas Carlyle's *The French Revolution* with only a few brief allusions to Bulwer Lytton. Moreover, Valerie Purton's 'Dickens and Bulwer Lytton: the Dandy Reclaimed?', *Dickensian*, n.s. 74 (1978), pp. 25-9 suggests that '[i]n *Not so Bad as We Seem* there are several foreshadowings of Dickens's later novels: the heroine Lucy, in her almost-maternal devotion to her father, surely suggests another Lucy in *A Tale of Two Cities*' (p. 26) but fails to mention *Zanoni*.

IV - Charles Dickens

(i)

Unlike the works of Edward Bulwer Lytton and Catherine Crowe, those of Charles Huffam Dickens (1812–70) were a success not only with their contemporary Victorian audience but have, significantly, retained their popularity into the twenty-first century. Born on 7 February 1812 in Portsmouth, where his father was a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, Dickens's life-story is arguably the best known of any Victorian author.¹⁵² In spite of his humble origins and lack of a classical education, his talent nevertheless brought him into the company of other major literary figures, including the aristocratic Edward Bulwer Lytton, with whom he formed an enduring friendship.

Valerie Puton explains how:

Bulwer [...] and Dickens, introduced [...] in the late 'Thirties were drawn inevitably into closer acquaintance in the 'Forties [...] Bulwer, a Regency dandy by birth and inclination yet strangely Victorian in his relentless energy [...] provided a curious counterpoint to Dickens, so overtly Victorian [...] yet so helplessly drawn [...] to the eccentric, the hedonistic, the 'aristocratic', in short, which he has been denied by birth.¹⁵³

Collaborating on a number of theatrical productions as well as providing critical feedback on each other's new works of fiction, Bulwer Lytton was almost

¹⁵² Reduced to labouring in a blacking factory when his father was imprisoned in the Marshalsea for debt, the young Charles Dickens strove to avoid his father's fate by gaining employment first as a solicitor's clerk and then, after teaching himself shorthand, as a parliamentary reporter. After a turbulent childhood, his first glimpse into the world of journalism proved to be vital: in 1833 his first story 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk' was published in the *Monthly Magazine* and was swiftly followed by other publications in various periodicals up until 1835, when he began to work as a reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*. The successful career that was to follow could not have been imagined: up until his death on 9 June 1870, Charles Dickens could truthfully claim to be a best-selling novelist, actor, editor, journalist and social reformer. His transformation from a very ordinary family into a self-made gentleman is important, as his childhood experiences are arguably reflected in his works of both fiction and non-fiction. For a more detailed analysis of Charles Dickens's life-story see, for example, Thomas Alfred Jackson, *Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), Barbara Hardy, *The Moral Art of Dickens* (Oxford: Athlone Press, 1970), Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (London: Burns and Oats, 1975), Grahame Smith 'The Life and Times of Charles Dickens' in *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. John O. Jordan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 1-15, Donald Hawes, *Charles Dickens* (London: Continuum, 2007) and Sally Ledger, 'Dickens and the Popular Radical Imagination', *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 50:3 (2008), pp. 498-99.

¹⁵³ Purton, 'The Dandy Reclaimed?', *Dickensian*, (pp. 25-26).

incorporated into the Dickens family. John Forster, who W. P. Frith describes as another 'intimate friend of Charles Dickens',¹⁵⁴ observes that on '13 March [1852] his [Dickens's] last child was born; and the boy, his seventh son, bears his godfather's distinguished name, Edward Bulwer Lytton'.¹⁵⁵

During the 1850s this relationship deepened further, with Bulwer Lytton and Dickens working closely together towards the 1851 foundation of the Guild of Literature and Art. Dissatisfied with the Royal Literary Fund,¹⁵⁶ Dickens and Bulwer Lytton wanted to make authorship a respected profession and so formed a rival Guild.¹⁵⁷ This ambitious project aimed to provide an insurance scheme and 'to provide houses for needy or retired writers and artists, built on Bulwer Lytton's estate at Knebworth [...] as well as [...] public lectures given by members'.¹⁵⁸ Although the society ultimately failed to fulfil its founders' intentions, the Guild did enjoy some initial success. *John Bull* documents that 'Mr. Charles Dickens and his friends [...] [were] solicited to visit Manchester a second time, for the purpose of repeating their amateur theatrical representations in aid of the fund designed to establish a Guild of Literature and Art', going on to say 'Sir E. B. Lytton and Mr. C. Dickens [...] [explained] in their usual happy manner, the objects of the Guild and the

¹⁵⁴ William Powell Frith, *My Autobiography and Reminiscences* (London: Richard Bentley, 1890), p.386. This work also devotes a chapter to Frith's portrait of Charles Dickens which was commissioned by John Forster in 1859.

¹⁵⁵ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Dent, 1966), I, p. 123.

¹⁵⁶ A society founded in 1790 to offer an element of financial security to members of the writing and artistic community.

¹⁵⁷ For more information on Dickens and Bulwer Lytton's ongoing feud with the Royal Literary Fund see K. J. Fielding's 'Dickens and the Royal Literary Fund – 1858', *Review of English Studies: A Quarterly Journal of English Literature and English Language*, n.s. 6:24 (October 1955), pp. 383-94. Fielding states that 'In 1851 he [Dickens] had consequently joined with Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton in founding the rival Guild of Literature and Art. But when they found that the Act of Parliament by which the Guild was constituted prohibited it – as Dickens told Thackeray – "from doing anything until it" should have "existed in a perfectly useless condition for seven years", they turned their attention to the possibility of gaining control of the Literary Fund' (p. 384).

¹⁵⁸ Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, 'Preface' in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, Nina Burgis (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), VI, p. ix.

circumstances which led to its formation'.¹⁵⁹ Dickens also wrote to Forster on 4 September 1852 praising Bulwer Lytton and commenting that 'Bulwer spoke brilliantly at the Manchester dinner [...] his earnestness and determination about the Guild was most impressive'¹⁶⁰ before, as Forster states, paying his colleagues the compliment of dedicating his forthcoming novel *Bleak House* (1853), 'to "his friends and companions in the Guild of Literature and Art"'.¹⁶¹ Dickens, then, had a clear professional and personal relationship with Bulwer Lytton. By contrast to his cruel public comments concerning Catherine Crowe's apparently spirit-induced naked appearance, Dickens overlooked Bulwer Lytton's covert interest in the spirit world apart from some light-hearted jibes.¹⁶² But what becomes apparent is that while Dickens openly mocked Bulwer Lytton's interest in spiritualism, they did share a common curiosity about the world of pseudo-science and, more specifically, mesmeric phenomena.

In the spring of 1838 Charles Dickens, who was still enjoying his success as the *fêted* author of *The Pickwick Papers*, began to attend the mesmeric demonstrations of the pioneering Dr. John Elliotson, lecturer at the University College Hospital.¹⁶³ The young Dickens enjoyed the soon-to-be notorious performances of mesmeric patients Elizabeth and Jane O'Key. Indeed, these early experiences proved to be vital

¹⁵⁹ Anon., 'Miscellaneous', *John Bull*, 4 September 1852, p. 656. The *Illustrated London News* also commented that '[i]t is because we honour and esteem the professors of literature [...] that they will take on this [...] high and dignified position'. See. Anon., 'The Guild of Literature and Art', *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 17 May 1851, n.s. 18, pp. 407-08 (p. 407).

¹⁶⁰ Dickens, *The Letters*, VI, p. 753. Bulwer Lytton's presence did, however, cause problems for Dickens because of the ever unpredictable Rosina Bulwer Lytton. She wrote to Dickens in May 1851 referring to the founding members as 'Sir Liar Coward Bulwer Lytton and his gang' whilst simultaneously branding the society 'the Guilt of Literature'. For more information see Dickens, *The Letters*, VI, pp. 388-89.

¹⁶¹ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (London: Dent, 1966), II, p. 113.

¹⁶² See the Bulwer Lytton section of chapter one for accusations made by Mme. Home about Edward Bulwer Lytton's belief in spiritualism.

¹⁶³ For more information about Dr. John Elliotson see Alison Winter's *Mesmerised* which explores his rise and fall in some detail.

in establishing not only a lifelong friendship between Dickens and Elliotson, but also a passionate interest in mesmerism which led to Dickens attempting to learn its secrets and practise the art himself. Fred Kaplan's extensive research into this aspect of Dickens's life and its influence upon his novels emphasises just how fascinated he became: 'Between January 1839 and June 1844 [...] Dickens began to talk about and practice mesmerism with an enthusiasm that found its way into the letters and memoirs of these years'.¹⁶⁴ What Kaplan's analysis highlights is that even after the O'Key sisters were exposed as fraudulent in the summer of 1838, leading to Elliotson being discredited and forced to resign from the University College Hospital, Dickens continued to support both Elliotson and this new and controversial pseudo-science:

The friendship between Dickens and Elliotson intensified during 1839 [...] they reciprocated invitations and met at parties of society's and art's elite. [...] Late in March, Macready entertained Elliotson at a dinner attended by Darwin, Carlyle, and Harriet Martineau. Whenever these dinners materialised, mesmerism was a topic of conversation, for as early as 1839 Richard Monckton Milnes, among others, had become an intense enthusiast. So too had Bulwer-Lytton. [...] At about this time Elliotson seems to have become the Dickens' family doctor.¹⁶⁵

Like Bulwer Lytton, Dickens became an openly declared advocate of mesmerism, incorporating allusions to it in his fiction, letters and journalism. After returning from their 1841-2 travels in America, during which he claimed to have successfully

¹⁶⁴ Fred Kaplan, *Dickens and Mesmerism: The Hidden Springs of Fiction* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 55. Kaplan's extensive research explores the rise of mesmerism in England, Dickens's initial interest in the subject as well as his subsequent attempt to mesmerise his family and, more importantly, its influence on works such as *Oliver Twist* (1837-8) *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838) and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1). I am not going to analyse the impact of mesmerism on Dickens's works of fiction. What I am interested in is the way in which Dickens passionately supported mesmerism yet, unlike Bulwer Lytton, ridiculed spiritualism. There is a sense that the scientific aspect of mesmerism convinced Dickens, whose interest in science in general influence his writings, of its validity. This is an aspect that I shall be exploring in greater detail in relation to Dickens's Christmas books.

¹⁶⁵ Kaplan, *Dickens and Mesmerism*, pp. 56-57.

mesmerised his wife Kate,¹⁶⁶ the whole Dickens family embarked on a tour of the continent from 1844-6. This trip proved to be important for a number of reasons: it saw Dickens build on the success of *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and write his second Christmas story and also to begin the hugely successful *Dombey and Son*, published in monthly instalments between October 1846 and April 1848. This journey also gave him the opportunity to further his acquaintance with the Swiss banker M. De la Rue who, in turn, allowed Dickens to attempt to cure Mme. De la Rue's terrifying hallucinatory nightmares through mesmeric treatment. Edgar Johnson suggests that 'Dickens felt convinced that he could banish the delusions [...] during the magnetic sleep'.¹⁶⁷ Dickens clearly upheld mesmeric 'exorcism' as an undoubted fact. Dickens seems confident in its efficacy and safety, using it upon his friends, family, and even appointing Dr. Elliotson as his family physician. This interest in mesmerism was not a passing whim: Charles Dickens continued throughout his life to endeavour to establish himself as an investigator of both conventional and pseudo-science.

Yet Dickens's interest in science is complex. With the launch of his weekly periodical *Household Words* in 1850, succeeded by *All the Year Round* in 1859, he secured a very public space to express his ideas, concerns and opinions on the contentious issue of early- to mid-Victorian science. As Elaine Ostry comments, 'the articles on science [...] show the difficulties the Victorians had in adjusting to scientific development and their need to find harmony in the chaos that science

¹⁶⁶ Edgar Johnson in his work *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (London: Allen Lane, 1977), p. 288 states that Dickens attempted to cure Kate's headache's through mesmerism.

¹⁶⁷ Johnson, *Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph*, p. 288. For more information on Dickens's mesmerism of Mme. De la Rue see Kaplan, *Dickens and Mesmerism*, pp. 74-105 and Louise Henson's 'Investigations and Fictions: Charles Dickens and Ghosts' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, eds. Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 44-63.

threatened'.¹⁶⁸ In a society already exposed to the contemporary scientific achievements displayed in the 1851 Great Exhibition, the pages of Dickens's periodicals were overloaded with articles discussing how science could affect, and go some way to explain, everything from superstition and magic to the cosmos and evolutionary thought.¹⁶⁹ More specifically, with regard to Charles Dickens's personal scientific interest, one of the key debates in which Dickens became embroiled was that surrounding the physicist Michael Faraday's groundbreaking discoveries in electricity and thermodynamics. Dickens had written to Faraday in May 1850, requesting the loan of his lecture notes on the combustion process of a candle for Dickens's own interest and for the use of other *Household Words* contributors who were preparing material on the topic.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, the manner in which he used this scientific understanding of the chemistry of a candle in the famous 'spontaneous

¹⁶⁸ Elaine Ostry, "'Social Wonders': Fancy, Science, and Technology in Dickens's Periodicals', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, n.s. 34:1 (2001), pp. 54-78 (p. 54). There is not enough space in this thesis to explore the issue of Dickens's interest in science in a great deal of depth. However, for more information see for example, Jude V. Nixon's "'Lost in the Vast Worlds of Wonder": Dickens and Science', *Dickens Studies Annual*, n.s. 35 (2005), pp. 267-333, K. J. Fielding's 'Dickens and Science?', *Dickens Quarterly*, n.s. 13:4 (1996), pp. 200-16. Additionally, Frank Lawrence's *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence: The Scientific Investigations of Poe, Dickens and Doyle* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2003) argues that Dickens promoted a view that the world was naturalistic, drawing upon Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots* (1983) and Ronald R. Thomas's *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Further works which link Dickens to ideas of natural scientific enquiry are George Levine's 'Little Dorrit and Three Kinds of Science', in *Dickens and Other Victorians: Essays in Honour of Phillip Collins*, ed. Joanne Shattock (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 3-24 and George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988). The issue of Dickens and science is also the focus of Louise Henson's 'Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and Victorian Science' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2000) and Shu-Fang Lai's 'Dickens and Science: Summaries of Contributions Related to Science in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1999).

¹⁶⁹ Ostry further states that '*Household Words* and *All the Year Round* were part of a large-scale effort to educate the Victorian public about scientific matters'. Elaine Ostry, 'Science, and Technology', *Periodicals Review*, n.s. 34:1 (2001), pp. 54-78 (p. 57).

¹⁷⁰ A vast number of articles on the subject of thermodynamics and, more specifically, Faraday's research into the chemistry of a candle appeared in *Household Words*, written by both Charles Dickens and contributors such as Percival Leigh and Charles Knight. Due to the space constraints of this thesis I am unable to go into detail about these articles but for more information see Ostry, 'Science, and Technology', pp. 54-78 and Ann Y. Wilkinson's '*Bleak House*: From Faraday to Judgement Day', *English Literary History*, n.s. 34:2 (June 1967), pp. 225-47.

combustion' scene in *Bleak House* (1853)¹⁷¹ drew criticism from the academic and writer George Henry Lewes who, as Gordon S. Haight points out, 'carefully reviewed the scientific facts' and subsequently commented on Dickens's scientific inaccuracy in the pages of the *Leader* in February 1853.¹⁷² Undeterred by this criticism, Dickens wrote a response which justified his use of the spontaneous combustion scene. Ann Y. Wilkinson comments that Dickens emphasised its position as 'an abnormal occurrence in the case of a "system" becoming too "inflammable"',¹⁷³ foregrounding Faraday's lecture notes as an authority before later writing to Dr. Elliotson asking for his unpublished lecture on the subject. What followed was an exchange of correspondence between Lewes and Dickens with both men remaining stubbornly unconverted to the opposite viewpoint: in effect, the debate seemed to reach a stalemate. Nevertheless, this clash of opinion exposed Dickens's passionate interest not simply in pseudo-sciences but also in more conventional science. Regardless of the accuracy of Dickens's claims, his desire to offer a rationally scientific explanation for seemingly irrational events is evident.

Surprisingly, I want to suggest that Charles Dickens and Catherine Crowe had more in common than he was prepared to admit. Prior to Crowe's nervous breakdown, the main thrust of *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) was on empirical investigation, focusing on science as a 'natural' means of explaining the paranormal. What seems to connect Charles Dickens, Catherine Crowe and Edward Bulwer Lytton

¹⁷¹ Dickens finished the serialised Part X of *Bleak House* with the spontaneous combustion of Mr. Krook who, after suffering this death, leaves behind nothing but a 'stagnant, sickening oil' that 'slowly drips and creeps [...] in a little thick nauseous pool', Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 516.

¹⁷² Gordon S. Haight, 'Dickens and Lewes on Spontaneous Combustion', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, n.s. 10:1 (June 1955), pp. 53-63 (p. 56). For more information on Dickens and spontaneous combustion see Jonathan Loesberg's 'A Fountain, A Spontaneous Combustion and the Mona Lisa: Duchamp's Symbolism in Dickens and Pater', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, n.s. 35:2 (2002), pp. 53-79.

¹⁷³ Wilkinson, 'From Faraday', *ELH*, n.s. 34:2 (June 1967), pp. 225-47 (p. 237).

is a shared, if varied, belief in psychic investigation as well as the power of science over the mind. As Louise Henson points out, 'with the exception of public health reform, Dickens took a more learned and scientific interest in ghosts than any other topical issue' and was 'engaged in controversies about ghosts throughout his professional life'.¹⁷⁴ But nowhere was he more tangled up in controversy than over the issue of spiritualism. It is here, however, that Dickens's similarities with both Catherine Crowe and Bulwer Lytton abruptly end. In contrast to Crowe's publicly declared belief and Bulwer Lytton's clandestine interest in the phenomenon, Dickens's writing emphasises what Graham Storey terms as his 'scepticism about the more extreme forms of spiritualism and their acceptance in the fashionable world'.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, Ruth Brandon states how:

¹⁷⁴ Louise Henson, "'In the Natural Course of Physical Things": Ghosts and Science in Charles Dickens's *All the Year Round*" in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth Century Media*, eds. Louise Henson, Geoffrey Cantor, Gowan Dawson, Richard Noakes, Sally Shuttleworth, Jonathan R. Topham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp. 113-23 (p. 113). This focuses on Dickens's role as an investigator of the paranormal but focuses predominantly on *All the Year Round*. I, however, am going to pursue this idea further in the later sections of this chapter with regard to Dickens's earlier works, specifically his *Christmas Books*. For other articles that address the issue of Dickens's interest in the paranormal see, for example, Philip Collins's 'Dickens on Ghost: An Uncollected Article', *Dickensian*, n.s. 59 (1963), pp. 5-14 who states that 'Dickens was always interested in ghost-stories' (p. 5), Harry Stone's *Dickens and the Invisible World: Fairy Tales, Fantasy, and Novel-Making* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1980), Katherine M. Briggs's 'The Folklore of Charles Dickens', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, n.s. 7 (1970), pp. 3-20 and Lang's *The Puzzle* who states that 'Foster gives examples of Dickens's tendency to believe in [...] premonitions: Dickens himself had a curious premonitory dream' (p. 18). Moreover, it is also interesting to note its connection with the idea of dual consciousness or somnambulism. A number of descriptions of half-waking states, and suggestively mesmeric trances, occur in works such as *Oliver Twist* (when Oliver wakes up to see Fagin retrieving something from a hiding place and a second time when he sees Fagin and Monks at the window of his cottage), *The Uncommercial Traveller* (in a piece entitled 'Shy Neighbours' where the strange properties of the state between waking and sleeping is described), *David Copperfield* (when David seems to be almost hypnotically drawn to the sleeping Uriah Heep) and in *Edwin Drood* (when John Jasper is in a drug-induced state). See also Ian Hacking's *Rewriting the Soul: Multiple Personality and the Sciences of Memory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts, 1830-1890*, ed. Jenny Bourne Tyler and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998) or M. Cronin's 'Maria Cristina Paganoni: The Magic Lantern: Representations of the Double in Dickens', *Dickens Quarterly*, n.s. 25:4 (2008), pp. 255-58. Discussion of this issue can be found in works such as Thomas Mayo's 'Case of Double Consciousness', *London Medical Gazette*, n.s. 1 (1859), pp. 1202-03, Frederic W. H. Myers's 'Multiplex Personality', *Nineteenth Century*, n.s. 20 (1886), pp. 648-66 and Eugene Azam's 'Periodical Amnesia: Or, Double Consciousness', *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, n.s. 3 (1876), pp. 584-612.

¹⁷⁵ Graham Storey, 'Preface' in *The Letters of Charles Dickens: The Pilgrim Edition*, eds., Margaret Brown, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997), IX, p. xiv.

Dickens, in an effort to shake him [Bulwer Lytton] out of his belief, arranged a *séance* with a popular medium at which the other participants were [...] Wilkie and Charles Collins, and the renowned French conjurer Robert-Houdin. "Everything the medium did was promptly outdone by Houdini, who really outspirited the spiritualist."¹⁷⁶

Although Dickens openly expressed his curiosity about ghosts, he was a staunch critic of the spirit rappings, manifestations, table-turning and automatic writing performed by popular mediums.¹⁷⁷ As Andrew Lang states, 'according to Forster, "such was Dickens's interest in things supernatural that, but for the strong restraining power of his common sense, he might have fallen into the follies of spiritualism"'.¹⁷⁸ Despite a passionate belief in the validity of mesmerism and its reputation as what John J. Cerillo terms 'a [...] direct precursor of Spiritualism',¹⁷⁹ Dickens, with many other high-profile Victorians, including Robert Browning and Michael Faraday, was left unmoved by the spiritualist movement whilst on his American travels in 1842 or during its heyday in Britain during the mid-Victorian period.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Knopf, 1983), p. 57.

¹⁷⁷ After Dickens's death in 1870, an American medium claimed to have completed the unfinished manuscript of *Edwin Drood* as a result of automatic writing whereby she claimed that the spirit of Dickens was being channelled through her body. See Brandon, *The Spiritualists*, p. 56. Additionally, between 1872 and 1873, an American mechanic from Vermont claimed to have finished the script of *Edwin Drood* when the spirit of Dickens returned to him. He published his finished text in 1874, entitled *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* and gave Charles Dickens as the author. Significantly, it was not only the spirit of Dickens who seemed to be the focus of *séances*. As Frank Podmore in *Mediums of the Nineteenth Century*, II, p. 33 explains, 'Sir Walter Scott, Stanley, and Sir Robert Peel are amongst the occasional communicators, whilst Benjamin Franklin, Shakespeare, and Shelley seem to have discoursed nightly'. Moreover, Henry Spicer also focuses on that way in which a Massachusetts medium claimed to communicate messages and poems from the deceased Edgar Allan Poe. See Henry Spicer, *Sights and Sounds: The Mystery of the Day: Comprising An Entire History of the American Spirit Manifestations* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1853).

¹⁷⁸ Andrew Lang, *The Puzzle of Dickens's Last Plot* (London: Chapman, 1905), p. xi.

¹⁷⁹ John J. Cerillo, *The Secularization of the Soul: Psychical Research in Modern Britain* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982), p. 18.

¹⁸⁰ Michael Faraday attempted to scientifically explain the phenomenon of table-turning (the practice of spirits inexplicably moving furniture or tilting tables touched by *séance* participants) by declaring that the movement was as a result of unconscious and unnoticed muscular movements by the *séance* participants. Extracts from Faraday's lecture are reprinted in John Newton Radcliffe's 1854 publication of *Fiends, Ghosts and Spirits: Including an Account of the Origin and Nature of Belief in the Supernatural* (London: Richard Bentley, 1854), pp. 267-76. Additionally, for more information see Cerillo, *The Secularization*, p. 21, Frank Podmore, *Mediums of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: University Books, 1963), II, p. 9. Additionally, Elisabeth Wadge's 'The Scientific Spirit and the Spiritual Scientist: Moving in the Right Circles', *Victorian Review*, n.s. 26:1 (2000), pp. 24-42 (p. 28) explores the medium Daniel Home's critical reaction to Faraday's statements.

Yet Dickens continually found himself involved in the spiritualism debate. N. C. Peyrouton foregrounds his scepticism, commenting that there were 'hot and cold, public and private wars that he waged against the Rappers',¹⁸¹ in which Dickens tirelessly strove to expose what he saw as the fraudulent nature of the phenomenon. Importantly, it was the periodicals which again acted as a forum for the argument. Louise Henson states that '[t]here was always a place for the well-authenticated ghost story, but Dickens's opinions about such things as mesmeric clairvoyance were apparent in the writings of others' although he warned 'against uncritically attributing such phenomena to the manifestation of ghosts'.¹⁸² In November 1852 Charles Dickens sent two of his best *Household Words* contributors, Henry Morley and W. H. Wills, to investigate a *séance* by a newly arrived American medium who had been advertising her psychic powers in the pages of *The Times*.¹⁸³ Perhaps predictably, Mrs. Maria B. Hayden was tested by the two men and exposed as fraudulent in 'The Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost'.¹⁸⁴ After recounting the history of spiritualism,

¹⁸¹ N. C. Peyrouton, 'Rapping the Rappers: More Gist for the Biographers' Mill', *Dickensian*, n.s. 55 (1959), pp. 19-30 (p. 19).

¹⁸² Henson, 'Investigations and Fictions' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, pp. 44-63 (p. 53).

¹⁸³ When conducting their investigations both reporters used pseudonyms: Henry Morely went under the name of Mr. Brown and W. H. Wills used the name Mr. Thompson. In *Mediums of the Nineteenth Century*, II, Frank Podmore comments on the relationship between Mrs. Hayden and the English periodicals, stating that '[o]f Mrs. Hayden's performances we have many accounts in the periodical literature of the time. [...] *Household Words* was first in the field, with an article ridiculing the whole matter. In the following year *Blackwood's Magazine*, the *National Miscellany*, and other papers took a similar line; whilst G. H. Lewes, in the *Leader*, showed how the trick was done' (pp. 4-5). It is significant that, in contrast to their dispute over the science behind spontaneous combustion, Lewes and Dickens seemed to agree on the issue of spiritualism.

¹⁸⁴ Dickens's interest and influence on the article is significant. On 5 November 1852 he wrote to Wills stating that '[i]n the matter of the Rappings, I think that a good name for the paper would be *The Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost* [...] it is a great thing in such a case to show that the imposition is an old and exploded one' (Dickens, *The Letters*, VI, p. 799). It is significant that Dickens chose the Cock Lane Ghost which was a scandal that gripped the London public in 1760-61. The scandal centred around a man called William Parsons who lived at 33 Cock Lane, London and claimed to be able to communicate with a ghost using a system of knockings. After attracting huge attention, it was exposed as a hoax when his daughter was discovered to have wooden clappers hidden under her dress. See Charles Wyllis Elliot's *Mysteries; or, Glimpses of the Supernatural* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1825) which discusses the event when 'Horace Walpole [was given] this luxury of a visit to our cock-lane ghost' (p. 76). For more general information see Paul Chambers's *The Cock Lane Ghost: Murder, Sex and Haunting in Dr. Johnson's London* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2006). Dickens included references to the Cock Lane Ghost in *Nicholas Nickleby* when Mrs. Nickleby states that she forgets

Morley and Wills state that there 'is an impiety and wickedness far exceeding the measure of an ordinary fraud, which trades upon our solemn love towards the dead' before bluntly commenting that '[k]nocking or rapping ghosts are no new imposition'.¹⁸⁵ The article resulted in a verbal attack on Dickens by the insulted Hayden which forced him to respond by publicly denying that he had attended the *séance*, and *Household Words* published 'The Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost Wrong Again', further fuelling the conflict by declaring that:

Mr. Dickens was never at the intensely exciting house and never beheld any of its intensely exciting inhabitants. Two trustworthy gentlemen attached to this Journal tested the spirit rappers at his request and found them to be the egregious absurdity described.¹⁸⁶

'whether it was my great-grandfather who went to school with the Cock Lane Ghost', see Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 605. The topic was also alluded to in the Victorian press: Anon., 'The Magazines', *John Bull*, 6 May 1843, p. 285; Anon., 'Provincial', *The Lady's Newspaper*, 30 October 1852, p. 263; More specifically with regard to Morley and Wills, Henry Spicer's 1853 work entitled *Sights and Sounds* criticises the two men for comparing 'nursery treasures of old' (p. 11) with the subject of spiritualism before stating that 'Messrs. Brown and Thompson are not the first, by many thousands, of able and intelligent men, who, while entertaining strong and natural suspicions of the manifestations, have been wholly unable to account for their accomplishment: and it certainly smacks of unfairness, that [...] Messrs. Brown and Thompson should brand this American lady as an impostor, without deigning anything in disproof of her assertion' (p. 12)

¹⁸⁵ Henry Morley and W. H. Wills, 'The Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost', *Household Words*, Saturday 20 November 1852, p. 139.

¹⁸⁶ Charles Dickens, 'The Ghost of the Cock Lane Ghost Wrong Again', *Household Words*, Saturday 15 January 1853, p. 420. It is also interesting to draw attention to the way in which Dickens's conflict with Mrs. Hayden, and spiritualism in general, may have influenced *Bleak House* (1853). Dickens's character, William Guppy – who, as Arthur L. Hayward in *The Dickens Encyclopaedia* (Leicester: Promotional Reprint Company, 1995) states, is a 'clerk to Kenge and Carboy, and a vulgar young man who [...] [falls] in love with Esther Summerson' (p. 76) – is a figure of ridicule and seems to be an, albeit faint, allusion to the real-life figure of Mr Guppy and his medium wife. Indeed, Mrs Guppy is frequently associated with spiritualism in the 1860s while it is significant that the first Mrs. Guppy (Mr. Guppy married twice with both women claiming to be mediums) also claimed to have psychic powers in the early 1850s. More specifically with regard to Dickens's William Guppy, Kathleen Tillotson in her brief article 'Bleak House at a Séance', *Dickensian*, n.s. 83 (1987), pp. 3-5 makes a passing comment that Phiz's illustration, 'Mr. Guppy's entertainment' which supplements the narrative describing a meeting in the novel between Mr. Guppy, Mr. Jobling and Mr. Smallweed has a *séance*-like feeling' but makes no reference to Dickens's language, the supernatural imagery used or the significance of the name Guppy. The article does, however, mention the way in which mediums with clairvoyant powers were consulted by contemporary readers of *Bleak House* to try and explain the mystery of who killed Mr. Tulkinghorn. Henry Spicer in *Facts and Fantasies: A Sequel to Sights and Sounds; The Mysteries of the Day* (London: T. Bosworth, 1853) explains how a 'young lady of the circle expressed a most solemn and fervent desire to put "one question – only one." It referred to a subject on which very great doubt and anxiety was felt; and would the spirits be so kind as at once to set the matter at rest? The spirits having acceded, the young inquirer [...] gravely demanded – "Who killed Mr. Tulkinghorn?"' (pp. 65-66). For more information on both of the real Mrs. Guppy see Frank Podmore, *Mediums of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: University Books, 1963), I; Pearsall's *Table Rappers* and Brandon's *The Spiritualists*.



This time, however, Mrs. Hayden chose to defend her reputation in print. In May 1853 she established her own periodical, aptly named *The Spirit World*, in order to communicate her interpretation of events before deciding to use the established *Spiritual Telegraph* as a vehicle for her dispute. After a period of relative calm, Dickens composed a satirical piece aptly named 'Well Authenticated Rappings' which purported to document 'three spiritual experiences of his [the writer's] own in the present truthful article',¹⁸⁷ but which actually again drew attention to the author's contempt for spiritualism. After this the Dickens-Hayden feud seemed to lose impetus. As N. C. Peyrouton notes, it was most probably because Dickens realised this public disagreement was giving Hayden all of the 'free publicity' she craved and Dickens preferred to wage a more general war against the spiritualist movement in Britain.¹⁸⁸

The 1850s and 1860s witnessed numerous anti-spiritualist publications in both *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. Importantly, Dickens's notorious control over and constant editing of prospective and published articles meant that his opinions were reflected in the work of his contributors.¹⁸⁹ For example, Henry Morley's 'New Discoveries in Ghosts' comments on the '[n]ew wonders [...] [i]n magnetism' as well as considering the 'researches of Faraday, and others'¹⁹⁰ before declaring that 'I do believe in ghosts – or, rather, spectres – only I do not believe them to be

¹⁸⁷ Charles Dickens, 'Well Authenticated Rappings', *Household Words*, Saturday 20 February 1858, p. 217.

¹⁸⁸ Peyrouton, 'Rapping the Rappers', *Dickensian*, n.s. 55 (1959), pp. 19-30 (p. 23)

¹⁸⁹ Dickens's anti-spiritualist attacks even sparked a reaction from the wife of the famous medium Daniel Dunglas Home many years after the debate had subsided. Mme. Dunglas Home's *The Gift of D. D. Home* states that '[t]he next name that I have to mention takes me back to the days when some of the most ignorant and furious attacks ever directed against spiritualism and spiritualists were published by the late Mr. Dickens in his well-known periodical. The clever novelists knew absolutely nothing of Home or the *séances* of Home. It does not seem that he ever exchanged a word with the first, and he certainly never was present at any of the second' (p. 31).

¹⁹⁰ Henry Morley, 'New Discoveries in Ghosts', *Household Words*, 17 January 1852, p. 403.

supernatural'.¹⁹¹ While this contribution is superficially focused on Morley's personal view, the reference to Faraday and magnetism hints at Dickens's own interest in the subject. This is also apparent in later articles such as Lynn Linton's 'Fallacies of Faith' in which superstition and witchcraft is compared with table-turning when Linton states that 'I also know that imposture is the easiest thing in the world to be practiced [...] I, as a sceptic, may not be able [...] to detect the imposture on the spot';¹⁹² in an earlier article she had commented that 'Spiritualism is nothing new: it is as old as the Egyptian caves'.¹⁹³ Significantly, however, although Dickens frequently encouraged his contributors to discuss spiritualism, he was himself never far away from this controversial topic, as is apparent in his fraught relationship with the former contributor to *Household Words*, the spiritualist William Howitt. As Henson notes:

In 1859 [...] Howitt. on a crusade to publicise 'truths' about spiritual laws, complained to Dickens about [...] [a] thought-impressing article in ATYR, which, in denying that a supernatural agency was necessarily involved in premonitions, also cast doubt on the authenticity of spiritual communication between the living and the dead.¹⁹⁴

Always eager to conduct any form of investigation, Dickens agreed – along with W. H. Wills, Wilkie Collins and John Hollingshead – to examine paranormal agencies in a Cheshunt house that Howitt believed to be haunted. As Harry Stone observes, '[u]npublished letters make it clear that Dickens visited Cheshunt about 12 December 1859'.¹⁹⁵ I suggest that this visit arguably influenced Dickens's first extra Christmas

¹⁹¹ Morley, 'New Discoveries', *Household Words*, 17 January 1852, p. 404.

¹⁹² Lynn Linton, 'Fallacies of Faith', *All the Year Round*, 15 September 1860, p. 541.

¹⁹³ Lynn Linton, 'Modern Magic', *All the Year Round*, 28 July 1860, p. 370. A great many articles appeared on the subject but there is not enough space to discuss them all in this thesis. See, for example, Henry Morley, 'The Death of a Goblin', *Household Words*, 28 December 1850, pp. 335-36; Anon., 'Magic and Science', *All the Year Round*, 23 March 1861, pp. 561-566; Anon., 'Strange and Yet True', *All the Year Round*, 16 August 1862, pp. 540-54; Anon., 'How Professor Gaster Lectured a Ghost', *All the Year Round*, 12 April 1862, pp. 107-11.

¹⁹⁴ Henson, 'Charles Dickens and Ghosts' in *Victorian Supernatural*, pp. 45-63 (p. 55).

¹⁹⁵ Harry Stone, 'The Unknown Dickens: With a Sample of Uncollected Writings', *Dickens Studies Annual*, n.s. 1(1971), pp. 1-22 (p. 11). This article details the strained correspondence between Dickens and Howitt whilst also exploring uncollected segments of 'The Haunted House'.

number of *All the Year Round* which was, significantly, entitled 'The Haunted House'. This tale documents the narrator's experiences in a reputedly ghostly home and, like Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Haunted and the Haunters*, which was published in the same year, concludes with the triumph of rational thinking over superstition.

The reaction to this story is perhaps predictable. A verbal clash ensued with the *Spiritual Magazine* printing 'Mr. H.'s Own Narrative and Mr. Dickens', criticising Dickens for 'throwing ridicule and denial on the subject'¹⁹⁶ before tauntingly declaring that Dickens's 'weekly journal is just now converted into a deputy *Spiritual Magazine*, by his successive ghost stories, and by the *Strange Story* of Sir Bulwer Lytton'.¹⁹⁷ As in his conflict with Mrs. Hayden, then, Howitt and Dickens were never reconciled on the subject: indeed, Howitt published *The History of the Supernatural*, foregrounding, like Catherine Crowe, the Christian nature of spiritualism and asking why '[e]ven those who [...] admit the truth of miracles [...] stop there, and can believe in nothing of the kind now-a-days'.¹⁹⁸ Dickens, though, continued his censure

¹⁹⁶ 'Mr. H.'s Own Narrative and Mr. Dickens', *Spiritual Magazine*, 1 December 1861, p. 543. It is also significant that in this article a great deal of emphasis is placed on Bulwer Lytton's occult inclination. The contributor states that 'Sir Bulwer Lytton is himself thoroughly acquainted with the more common phenomena, having both observed and practised them for several year, and hence he is very capable of making skilful use of them with his easy pen' (p. 543). It is also interesting that a further article directly naming Dickens appeared in the *Spiritual Magazine* entitled 'Mr. Charles Dickens and Mr. Hepworth Dixon', 1 March 1867, stating that 'I am one of the multitude of Englishmen who feel proud of the well-earned fame of Charles Dickens, but I have ever felt a deep regret that he should have allowed the pages of his excellent miscellanies to be marred by the puerilities which [...] have been contributed on spiritual subjects by his subordinates, and still more so that he should have himself descended to ridicule a truth which he had not investigated' (p. 97). It is not surprising that the *Spiritual Magazine* reacted in such a way because, as Frank Podmore states in *Mediums of the Nineteenth Century*, II, '[t]owards the end of the decade 1850-60 [...] a small group of literary men and others had become interested in the subject, and the *Spiritual Magazine* [...] made its appearance in London [...] [and] continued until the end of 1875 to be the leading organ of English Spiritualism. The editors of the new periodical for the greater part of its career were Thomas Shorter and W. M. Wilkinson, and its chief contributor William Howitt' (p. 162).

¹⁹⁷ 'Mr. H.'s Own Narrative', *Spiritual Magazine*, p. 543.

¹⁹⁸ William Howitt, *The History of the Supernatural in All Ages and Nations, and in All Churches, Christian and Pagan, Demonstrating a Universal Faith* (London: Longman, 1863), I, p. 114.

with articles such as 'Rather a Strong Dose', 'Spirits on their Last Legs' and 'At Home with the Spirits' appearing in *All the Year Round* in the 1860s.¹⁹⁹ But in all Dickens's various dealings with spiritualism there is an insistence on rational thinking and observation, and an evident disapproval of its tendency to exploit individual grief. While he never refrained from addressing the topic of restless spirits in his fiction, there is always a subtle criticism of spiritualism, a criticism that conflicts with the work of Edward Bulwer Lytton and Catherine Crowe. Significantly, and again in contrast to both Bulwer Lytton and Crowe, Dickens resists placing any religious significance on the subject of ghosts: the paranormal never seems to cross over into the realm of the Divine.

Charles Dickens's relationship with Christianity is far from straightforward.²⁰⁰

Although the issue of faith in the Victorian period is, in itself, hugely complex and conflicted, Dickens's ever-changing belief is well documented and suggestive of the turmoil that the society itself experienced. Arthur H. Adrian notes that on the morning of Dickens's death on 12 June 1870, a 'clergyman denounced Dickens as a writer

¹⁹⁹ Anon., 'Rather a Strong Dose', *All the Year Round*, 21 March 1863, pp. 84-7 is a response to provocation from Howitt while Anon., 'Spirits on Their Last Legs', *All the Year Round*, 5 August 1865 is a direct attack on the popular medium, Daniel Home, and a Mr. and Mrs Wallace who are 'in the habit of advertising themselves every week in the Spiritual Times' (p. 46). Furthermore, Anon., 'At Home with the Spirits', *All the Year Round*, 3 March 1866 sees the narrator stating that 'I have given mediums and manifestations a fair hearing from the electro-biological period of twenty years ago, down to Mr. Home's last lecture [...] and record my impressions' (p. 181) and concludes with a criticism on the way in which spiritualism presents itself as a type of quasi-religion.

²⁰⁰ There is a wealth of criticism discussing the topic of religion in the life and individual works of Charles Dickens. I want to show how complex Dickens's religious ideologies were. Importantly, he never saw spiritualism in any sort of religious context. For more information on Dickens and religion see Janet L. Larson's *Dickens and the Broken Scripture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), which argues that orthodox Christianity informs Dickens's early novels, showing how his novels after *Bleak House* display a less secure and complex faith: the Bible plays a paradoxical role in Dickens's works. Additionally, R. J. Cruikshank's *Charles Dickens and Early Victorian England* (London: Pitman, 1949) and Thomas Alfred Jackson's *Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical* (London: Wishart, 1937) look at Dickens's dislike of the punitive theology of the Hell-fire school as well as the effect of the Oxford Movement. For an analysis of Dickens's works in relation to evolutionary theory see Samuel Davey's *Darwin, Carlyle and Dickens* (New York: Haskell, 1971). However, perhaps the best work exploring Dickens's tangled relationship with Christianity is Dennis Walder's *Dickens and Religion* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981).

“who never ceased to sneer at and vilify religion.”²⁰¹ Nevertheless, Dickens’s London draws parallels with the traditional depiction of Hell²⁰² while, as Thomas Alfred Jackson argues, ‘he seems, positively, to have yearned for excuses to believe in Heaven – especially for little children who die young’.²⁰³ In effect, therefore, many of his novels display what Dennis Walder terms as ‘Dickens’s [...] “social” Christianity’;²⁰⁴ the notion that religion should be directed towards society and social action with an emphasis on forgiveness and charity.²⁰⁵ Significantly, while his ‘social gospels’ – works such as *Oliver Twist* (1837), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838), *Bleak House* (1853) and *Little Dorrit* (1857) – have recurring allusions to a New Testament philosophy, there is a suggestion that, beneath Dickens’s often fraught affiliation with religion, he, as Thomas Alfred Jackson again states, ‘seems to have believed in some sort of God’.²⁰⁶ Dickens even goes so far as to adapt the Gospel of Luke, writing the *Life of Our Lord* for the private use of his own children between the years 1846-49.²⁰⁷ John Forster draws attention to his friend’s complex relationship with God, choosing to include Dickens’s will as an appendix in his work, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, which clearly states that:

²⁰¹ Arthur H. Adrian, ‘Dickens and the Brick-and-Mortar Sects’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, n.s. 10:3 (1955), pp. 188-201 (p. 188).

²⁰² Alexander Welsh, *The City of Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), p. 65. Lance St. John Butler also draws attention to Hell imagery in Dickens’s work in *Victorian Doubt: Literary and Cultural Discourses* (London: Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 28-55.

²⁰³ Jackson, *Progress of a Radical*, p. 271.

²⁰⁴ Walder, *Dickens and Religion*, p. 144.

²⁰⁵ John Forster seems to draw upon Dickens’s position as an author of the ‘social gospel’, suggesting that Dickens’s works have an almost biblical message for those who remain untouched by religion. Indeed, in his *Life of Dickens*, II, Forster prints the story of an American gentleman who, some years previously, become snow-bound in the Sierra Nevada Mountains. In this bleak place he met a man living in a hut which was isolated from any form of society. This man, however, had been given *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Pickwick Papers* by an Emigrant traveller who had stumbled across his hut. The American man notes the effect that these narrative had on the man, commenting that ‘[h]e had no Bible; and perhaps if he practised in his rude savage way all that Dickens taught, he might less have felt the want even of that companion’ (p. 316).

²⁰⁶ Jackson, *Progress of a Radical*, p. 270.

²⁰⁷ For further analysis of Dickens’s depiction of Christ in *The Life of Our Lord* see Sue Zemka, *Victorian Testaments: The Bible, Christology, and Literary Authority in Early-Nineteenth-Century British Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 117-47.

I commit my soul to the mercy of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and I exhort my dear children humbly to try to guide themselves by the teaching of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and to put no faith in any man's narrow construction of its letter here or there.²⁰⁸

The language is significant: while Dickens openly declares a belief in Christianity and urges his children to follow the teachings of the Bible, he does, however, imply a criticism of the established Church. The clause 'put no faith in any man's narrow construction' is a thinly veiled criticism of the clergy of all denominations, hinting at Dickens's dislike of narrow-minded religious customs and the general hypocrisy that is often perceived to be associated with religion.²⁰⁹ There is a sense, therefore, that, as with many issues surrounding Charles Dickens, his faith is not straightforward. At one moment, his narratives are manipulated to criticise dogmatic Christianity while in the next, Dickens is foregrounding the importance of the moral messages of the Scriptures. But regardless of Dickens's ambiguous beliefs, one aspect of religion that he remains clear about is its absolute distinction from spiritualism: Ruth Glancy states, 'Dickens deplored [spiritualism] because many Victorian mistook it for genuine religious experience'.²¹⁰ Nonetheless, although elements of the supernatural creep into many of Dickens's character portrayals – Miss Havisham's ghostly figure haunting *Great Expectations*, for example, or the fairytale images which shape Betsy Trotwood's representation in *David Copperfield* – this thesis contends that Dickens's personal fascination with the carnivalesque elements of the Christmas season allow him to experiment with preternatural images in a more comfortable manner.

²⁰⁸ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, II, p. 422.

²⁰⁹ For example, in 1845 when Dickens visited Rome during Holy Week with his wife, M. De la Rue and Mme. De la Rue he remains completely unimpressed with all of the religious ritual and ceremony that seized the capitol. Edgar Johnson in *His Tragedy and Triumph* explores this event in detail, stating that '[i]t was the ancient Rome of the republic and the Caesars that burned in his imagination, not the Renaissance pomp of the wicked old city or the ecclesiastical traditions of a Church that seemed to him a mass of degrading superstitions' (p. 293).

²¹⁰ Ruth Glancy review of Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Ghost in the Garden Room*, *Catholic Historical Review*, n.s. 93:3 (July 2007), pp. 690-92 (p. 691).

Significantly, moreover, even in his supernaturally infected *Christmas Books* Dickens's connection with social realism overshadows both the Gothic and the ghostly elements. As Louis Cazamin notes '[s]ocial teaching is scattered throughout Dickens's works'.²¹¹

Charles Dickens's writings are strongly associated with Christmas.²¹² Indeed, David Parker notes 'Dickens's enthusiasm for the festival as early as 1835' before emphasising that we 'have records of the charades party he hosted on Christmas Eve 1840, closely followed by another on 4 January with dancing [...] Dickens was a devotee of Christmas'.²¹³ With works such as *Sketches by Boz* (1836), *Great Expectations* (1860-1), *Edwin Drood* (1870) and, perhaps most noticeably, *Pickwick Papers* (1836)²¹⁴ all incorporating some form of a Christmas scene into the narrative, the value Dickens attributed to this season is clear, establishing the author as what Bertram Waldrom Matz calls 'The Apostle of Christmas'.²¹⁵ But Dickens restrained himself from writing a 'Christmas novel' *per se*. Instead he chose the format of the

²¹¹ Louis Cazamin, *The Social Novel in England 1830-1850: Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs. Gaskell, Kingsley* (London: Routledge, 1973), p. 125.

²¹² As Thomas Alfred Jackson in *Progress of a Radical* notes, '[B]ritish journalists seem obsessed with the notion that the works of Charles Dickens are full of descriptions of [...] an "old-fashioned Christmas"' (p. 285) while G. K. Chesterton in *Charles Dickens* commented that the ideal of Christmas 'belongs pre-eminently to Dickens' (p. 163). For more criticism on Charles Dickens and Christmas see David Parker, *Christmas and Charles Dickens* (New York: AMS, 2005); Alex Cobban, *Charles Dickens and Christmas Customs* (Brentwood: Discovering London, 1986); Simon R. L. Carter, *Christmas Past, Christmas Present: Four Hundred Years of English Seasonal Customs 1600-2000* (London: Geffrye Museum, 1997); Patricia K. Davis, *A Midnight Carol: A Novel of How Charles Dickens Saved Christmas* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).

²¹³ David Parker, 'Dickens and the American Christmas', *Dickens Quarterly*, n.s. 19:3 (September 2002), pp. 160-69 (p. 165). Phillip Collins's 'Carol Philosophy, Cheerful Views', *Etudes Anglaises: Grande-Bretagne, Etats – Unis*, n.s. 23 (1970), pp. 158-67 also notes that Dickens's 'family and friends recall that Christmas was the dearest time of the year to him, a time when he was "always at his best, a splendid host, bright and jolly as a boy [...] his light-heartedness, his buoyancy, were simply immense"' (p. 163).

²¹⁴ As John Butt in *Pope, Dickens and Others* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969) discusses, '[t]he ninth monthly number of *Pickwick Papers* (chapters xxviii-xxx) was published in December 1836, and was clearly intended to suit the Christmas season' (p. 134). The account of Christmas Day at Dingley Dell is perhaps his most famous Christmas episode although in the course of the narrative Pickwick and his friends relate a total of five ghost stories.

²¹⁵ Bertram Waldrom Matz, *Charles Dickens: The Story of his Life and Writings* (London: Dickens Fellowship Publication, 1902), p. 5.

novella for his five Christmas books – *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846) and *The Haunted Man* (1848) – before, in 1850, beginning his ‘Christmas Numbers’ in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*.²¹⁶ Dickens wanted to foster a storytelling technique, using the format of a short tale to encourage his Christmas works to be read aloud. Ruth Glancy draws attention to this aspect:

It is no accident that most of Dickens’s short stories were written for Christmas. He associated storytelling with the Christmas fireside, with narrators entertaining and teaching each others through the medium of the ghost story²¹⁷.

I argue that Dickens is building upon a tradition of using supernatural tales as festive winter entertainment, a tradition seen in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* when Mamillius declares that ‘A sad tale’s best for winter: I have one/ Of sprites and goblins’.²¹⁸ Moreover, an echo of Mamillius’s statement emerges in Dickens’s ‘A Christmas Tree’ (1850). The speaker of the sketch declares that ‘we are telling Winter Stories – Ghost Stories [...] – round the Christmas fire; and we have never stirred, except to draw a little nearer to it’,²¹⁹ again reiterating the interconnection between

²¹⁶ Deborah A. Thomas’s *Dickens and the Short Story* (London: Batsford, 1982) closely discusses the authorship of the various Christmas numbers, looking at the Office Books to try and decipher which contributors worked with Dickens on the various stories. Ruth Glancy’s ‘Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, n.s. 35:1 (June 1980), pp. 53-72 states that ‘[s]torytelling has always been part of Christmas tradition, but for Dickens it had particular power’ (p. 54) before emphasising the success of his Christmas stories in the periodicals. This issue is also discussed by John Forster in *The Life of Charles Dickens*, II, in a chapter entitled ‘Christmas Books Closed and *Household Words* begun 1848-50’.

²¹⁷ Ruth Glancy, *Dickens’s Christmas Books, Christmas Stories and Other Short Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1985), p. xx.

²¹⁸ William Shakespeare, *A Winter’s Tale*, II.2.25-6 in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1999). Nina Auerbach’s *Private Theatricals: The Lives of the Victorians* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1990) also focuses on the Christmas period as a ghost season, emphasising how the Victorians transformed the Saviour’s birth into a time of apparitions.

²¹⁹ Charles Dickens, ‘A Christmas Tree’, *Household Words*, 21 December 1850, p. 293.

Christmas, winter and ghosts. There is a repeated emphasis on Christmas as a time for something carnivalesque when ordinary life ceases for a single day.²²⁰

(ii)

On 17 December 1843, whilst producing monthly instalments for the serialised *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Charles Dickens published his 'most perfect and most loved work' which 'changed the course of Christmas publishing'.²²¹ *A Christmas Carol* was the first, and undoubtedly the most successful, of Dickens's five *Christmas Books* written between 1843 and 1848.²²² Financial strains undoubtedly drove its publication – the first issue of *Martin Chuzzlewit* had sold only 20,000 copies compared to *The Old Curiosity Shop*'s 100,000. Dickens needed to boost his profits and hoped that his new Christmas novella would be a money-maker. But even Dickens could not have imagined the success that was to follow. Brian Sigley foregrounds its enduring popularity, stating that '[t]he characters have been turned into figurines and toby-jugs

²²⁰ Brian Sibley in *A Christmas Carol: The Unsung Story* (Oxford: Albatross, 1994) explores the history of Christmas and the carnivalesque nature of the season, foregrounding not only the connection between 'Christian and Pagan festivals' (p. 27), which arguably make up Christmas, but also the Middle Age emphasis on celebrating the festival with masques and feasts. Importantly, Sibley states that Christmas is an 'embodiment of fun, frolic and disorder, the origins [...] date back to the Roman Saturnalia when people elected mock kings, wore masks, dressed-up and even cross-dressed' (p. 28). Furthermore, Reverend Charles Maurice Davies in *Mystic London: Or, Phases of Occult Life in the Metropolis* (London: Tinsley, 1975) comments on the strange tradition of 'a Spartan exhibition [of] [...] a Christmas Dip in the Serpentine' (p. 133).

²²¹ Glancy, *Dickens's Christmas Book*, p. xix.

²²² Although Dickens's *Christmas Books* have received a lot less critical attention than his novels, there is, nevertheless, still a wealth of research concerning *A Christmas Carol*. See Doris Feldmann's 'Victorian (Dis)Enchantments: Fantasy and Realism in the Visions and Revisions of Scrooge and Alice', *Anglistik Und Englischunterricht*, n.s. 59 (1996), pp. 101-25; Andrew Smith's 'Dickens' Ghosts: Invisible Economies and Christmas', *Victorian Review*, n.s. 31:2 (2005), pp. 36-55; James J. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes's 'Solitude and Ghosts in Dickens's Christmas Books', *Dickensian*, n.s. 89:1 (Spring 1993), pp. 218-25; Natalie Shainess's 'Charles Dickens: The First (interpersonal) Psychoanalyst Or – *A Christmas Carol*: A Literary Psychoanalysis', *American Journal of Psychoanalysis*, n.s. 52:4 (1992), pp. 351-62. For further works on *A Christmas Carol* see: Sue Saltmarsh, 'Spirits, Miracles and Clauses: Economy, Patriarchy and Childhood in Popular Christmas Texts', *Papers: Explorations into Children's Literature*, n.s. 17:1 (May 2007), pp. 5-18; Karen Petroski, "'The Ghost of an Idea": Dickens's Uses of Phantasmagoria, 1842-44' in *Dickens Quarterly*, n.s. 16:2 (June 1999), pp. 71-93; Philip V. Allingham, 'Dickens' Christmas Books: Names and Motifs', *English Language Notes*, n.s. 29:4 (June 1992), pp. 59-69; Kathleen Tillotson, 'A Background for *A Christmas Carol*', *Dickensian*, n.s. 89:3 (Winter 1993), pp. 165-69; Philip Collins, 'The Reception and Status of the *Carol*', *Dickensian*, n.s. 89:3 (Winter 1993), pp. 170-76.

[...] and put to work by the advertisers of soups, cigars, lagers, hamburgers, [and] electronic calculators'²²³ while Glancy notes how 'every year it reappears in hundreds of different formats, from comic book to reproductions of the [...] manuscript, in every language from Arabic to Zulu [...] on stage and film'.²²⁴ This tale has become an integral part of the culture of Christmas. Furthermore, Dickens's own affection for *A Christmas Carol* is clear: it was 'his first public reading when he began to perform for charity in 1853' and remained 'the most popular item in his repertoire and loomed large in his farewell reading at the end of his life'.²²⁵ Forster reiterates its importance to Dickens, recalling that on

Monday 2 December [1867], he read for the first time in Boston, his subjects being the *Carol* and the *Trial from Pickwick*; and his reception [...] went beyond all expectations formed. "It is really impossible," he wrote to me next morning, "to exaggerate the magnificence of the reception or the effect of the reading".²²⁶

Dickens's immense popularity seems to be somehow linked to the success of the *Carol*: indeed, his reputation undoubtedly benefited from an ever-growing public affection for this story which, perhaps even more surprisingly, pleased the critics as well as the public.

The contemporary critical response to *A Christmas Carol* was nothing short of remarkable. Graham Holderness focuses on its reception, declaring that '[i]n Dickens' own time, this popularity needed no justification or defence' before arguing that not only the author's own mass readership, but also 'reviewers, [...] and men of letters were convinced that the book's wide and common appeal was an unmistakeable

²²³ Sigley, *Unsung Story*, p. 14.

²²⁴ Glancy, 'Introduction' in *Christmas Books*, p. ix.

²²⁵ Norman Page, *A Dickens Companion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 256.

²²⁶ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, II, p. 321. For more information, and a contemporary account of, Charles Dickens's 1867 public reading see Kate Field, *Pen Photographs of Charles Dickens's Readings: Taken from Life*, ed. Carolyn J. Moss (New York: Whitson, 1999).

guarantee of literary quality'.²²⁷ Such positive reviews appeared in a wide spectrum of Victorian periodicals, newspapers and magazines. For example, the *Athenaeum* praised the tale as a 'jovial, genial piece of Christmas fare'²²⁸ while *The Illustrated London News* labelled it as 'an exquisite work'.²²⁹ *The Literary Gazette* emphasised *A Christmas Carol*'s strengths, but focused on the artistry of the 'finely blended',²³⁰ natural and supernatural characteristics, a favourable viewpoint reiterated by the *Spectator* whose critic argued that the ghost scenes are 'depicted with vivid force and humorous pleasantry'.²³¹ The critic for *John Bull* declared that:

The book is not very ponderous – only 168 pages – and we defy any one who begins it to lay it down til he gets to the end. Mingled with its humour, its wit, and its fidelity to nature in the characters, there is a fine moral lesson inculcated through the medium of a highly imaginative and powerful fiction, which is quite original in its conception.²³²

But such praise was nothing in comparison to William. M. Thackeray's comments in *Fraser's Magazine*. Evidently struck by the narrative's moral impact as well as Dickens's style, Thackeray passionately announces the story to be of a 'national benefit' and a 'personal kindness' to its reader.²³³ With public and critical admiration consistently directed towards *A Christmas Carol*, it is surprising that it should be Dickens's close friend and colleague, Edward Bulwer Lytton, who drew attention to the negative aspects of the tale. In 'Charles Dickens and Edward Bulwer-Lytton', Sibylla Jane Flower focuses on Bulwer Lytton's derogatory remarks, made in an unpublished letter to John Forster dated 25 December 1844. Flower reveals also

²²⁷ Graham Holderness, 'Imagination in *A Christmas Carol*', *Etudes Anglaises*, n.s. 32 (1979), pp. 28-45 (p. 28).

²²⁸ Anon., 'A Christmas Carol in Prose; Being a Ghost Story of Christmas', *Athenaeum*, 23 December 1843, pp. 1127-28 (p. 1127).

²²⁹ Anon., 'A Christmas Carol', *Illustrated London News*, 23 December 1843, pp. 410-11 (p. 410).

²³⁰ Anon., 'A Christmas Carol in Prose', *Literary Gazette*, 23 December 1843, p. 824.

²³¹ Anon., 'Mr. Dickens's Ghost Story', *Spectator*, 23 December 1843, pp. 1216-17 (p. 1216).

²³² Anon., 'A Christmas Carol in Prose; Being a Ghost Story of Christmas', *John Bull*, Saturday 23 December 1843, p. 813.

²³³ William. M. Thackeray, 'A Box of Novels', *Fraser's Magazine*, February 1844, pp. 153-69 (p. 169).

Bulwer Lytton's disparagement of Dickens's later Christmas story *The Chimes*. Bulwer Lytton suggested that 'it is cleverer than the Xmas Carol which was overrated but it does not create the same agreeable feelings to which that owed its popularity'.²³⁴ Regardless of Bulwer Lytton's blunt comments, however, *A Christmas Carol* was an immense success: it set the pattern for the following four *Christmas Books* and simultaneously cemented Dickens's reputation as an author with a social conscience as well as an unparalleled imagination.

On a basic level, *A Christmas Carol* is a tale of moral reform. The central protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, is a miserly Utilitarian businessman whose support for Malthusian ideas for controlling population growth, with its negative effect upon society, results in contempt for the poor and an utterly dismissive attitude towards any form of charity.²³⁵ What this thesis explores, however, is how *A Christmas Carol* overtly builds upon Dickens's earlier 'social gospels', but also uses a supernatural framework for entertainment purposes. For example, towards the close of the narrative, Scrooge's third visitor, the Ghost of Christmas Future, shocks the man by producing two London street urchins:

They were a boy and a girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish [...] Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them [...] Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked; and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of

²³⁴ Sibylla Jane Flower, 'Charles Dickens and Edward Bulwer-Lytton', *Dickensian*, n.s. 68 (1973), pp. 79-89 (p. 84).

²³⁵ Building upon Dickens's personal outrage and horror after visiting what Michael Slater terms as 'Samuel Storey's newly founded Field Lane ragged School, which was striving to give some basic education to the local street urchins' in September 1843, Dickens decided to write a Christmas story as a means of foregrounding the plight of the impoverished lower classes. See, Michael Slater, 'Introduction to *A Christmas Carol*' in *The Christmas Books: A Christmas Carol. The Chimes* (London: Penguin, 1985), I, pp. 33-36 (p. 36).

humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.²³⁶

This striking depiction of two tormented children, representing ‘Ignorance’ and ‘Want’ (C.C p. 108), is unmistakably constructed to emphasise their stolen innocence: born into poverty and hardship, the emotive language suggests that they are the product of an abusive and neglectful society. As in Dickens’s earlier portrayals of Oliver Twist and Smike, the concept of the angelic child is shown to be in danger, warning of the fragile nature of innocence while simultaneously reaching out to the Victorian reader’s social conscience. Such subtle yet powerful messages occur frequently throughout the text, until Scrooge finally promises to ‘not shut out the lessons they [the spirits] teach’ (C.C. p. 126). Superficially, *A Christmas Carol* is quite clearly Dickens’s attempt at social reform, using a Christmas message of tolerance, generosity and goodwill to arouse some degree of moral awareness. Yet, as with much of Dickens’s writing, this tale is complex: the supernatural aspects trouble the moral narrative, subverting the ethics and suggesting that there is more to *A Christmas Carol* than first meets the eye.

Charles Dickens frequently draws upon the paranormal in both his fictional writing and journalism. But while *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* are laden with stories of ghosts, witches and strange happenings, nowhere is this more condensed than in his *Christmas Books* where science is arguably banished to the background. In *A Christmas Carol* there is only a brief allusion to the pseudo-science

²³⁶ Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol* in *The Christmas Books: A Christmas Carol, The Chimes*, ed. Michael Slater (London: Penguin, 1985), I, p. 108. All further references to *A Christmas Carol* is to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis with the abbreviation C.C.

of phrenology²³⁷ – an interest that Dickens shared with Catherine Crowe and Edward Bulwer Lytton – when the narrator comments on Old Fezziwig's 'organ of benevolence' (C.C. p. 75) in an attempt to accentuate his kind-hearted character. There are few attempts to use scientific terminology or rational thinking to explain the supernatural intrusions. Significantly, however, when Scrooge views the preternatural glow forewarning the second of the three spirits, his reaction is expressed in suggestively scientific terms: 'the [...] ruddy light [...] was more alarming [...] as he was powerless to make out what it meant [...] he might be at that very moment an interesting case of spontaneous combustion' (C.C. p. 86). Scrooge cannot explain the ghostly experience and seeks for some form of scientific explanation. Unlike Mr. Krook in *Bleak House* Scrooge does not burst into flames. Nonetheless, the text, albeit fleetingly, reverts to science, but such moments are short-lived because, as Harry Stone argues, the narrative adopts a self-conscious fairytale structure.²³⁸ Although the magical happenings, manipulated time-frame and dream-like conclusion work to produce a mythical moral nursery story, the supernatural elements have parallels with the Gothic: an emphasis on death and haunting spirits seems to blend traditionally Gothic features into the social realist text.

Published a year after Dickens's travels across America, *A Christmas Carol* coincides with the birth of spiritualism in the United States. Furthermore, the story

²³⁷ Phrenology is the pseudo-scientific study of various sections of the human skull. Individual characteristics and personality traits were commonly believed to be 'read' by examining the shape, size and contour of the skull.

²³⁸ Harry Stone in 'A Christmas Carol: Giving Nursery Tales a Higher Form' in *The Haunted Mind: The Supernatural in Victorian Literature*, ed. Elton E. Smith and Robert Haas (London: Scarecrow Press, 1999), pp. 11-18 suggests that the *Christmas Books* 'draw their innermost energies from fairy tales; they exploit fairy-tale themes, fairy-tale happenings, and fairy tale techniques [...] [they] are fairy tales' (p.11) while Susan K Gillman and Robert L. Patten in 'Dickens: Doubles: Twain: Twins', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, n.s. 39:4 (March 1985), pp. 441-58 call the story a 'fable' (p.445). For more research on the fairy tale aspect of the narrative see also Harry Stone's 'A Fairy-Tale Form in A Christmas Carol' in *Readings on Charles Dickens*, ed Clarice Swisher (San Diego: Greenhaven, 1997), pp. 74-81.

was published only three years before Edward Bulwer Lytton's own influential occult novel *Zanoni* (1846) and, perhaps even more significantly, only five years prior to Catherine Crowe's *The Night side of Nature* (1848). Even though at this point Dickens had not yet become embroiled in a war of bitter words with spiritualist activists such as Mrs. Hayden, there is still an implication that the society of the early 1840s was fascinated by restless spirits. The ghosts that haunt Dickens's most popular Christmas book are much more complex constructions than they first seem. Perhaps the most obvious reference to spiritualism – and, more specifically, spirit rapping – is the various knocks and striking of clocks which signal a ghostly presence: Scrooge's front door knocker famously transforms into Marley's ghostly face before any fully visible spirit appears.²³⁹ Subsequently, 'the hour bell' is described as sounding a 'deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE' (C.C. p. 67) just as the Ghost of Christmas Past materialises, while the 'bell struck One' (C.C. p. 85) before the second spirit and finally 'struck twelve' (C.C. p. 109) to warn the trembling Scrooge that his third grim visitor has arrived. Scrooge becomes aware of his very first supernatural apparition when:

The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by clanking noises, deep down below; as if some person were dragging a heavy chain [...] Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains. (C.C. p. 57)

Immediately Scrooge draws upon a Gothic tradition: his reaction is to think of tales of haunting spectres, and not even to consider any rational explanation for the strange sounds. Moreover, distinct parallels emerge between the description of the tormented

²³⁹ The spiritualists claimed that spirits of the dead can be contacted through the psychic powers of a medium. Moreover, there is almost no critical research into the spiritualist influences upon *A Christmas Carol* apart from John Harvey's *Photography and Spirit* (London: Reaktion, 2007) which compares John Leech's original illustrations for *A Christmas Carol* with later spiritualist photography. For more information on the visual images in all five of the *Christmas Books* see, Emily Walker Heady's 'The Negative's Capability: Real Images and the Allegory of the Unseen in Dickens's *Christmas Books*', *Dickens Studies Annual*, n.s. 31 (2002), pp. 1-21.

ghost of Jacob Marley and Catherine Crowe's narratives of suffering spirits bound to earth in *A Night Side of Nature*. For example, Marley describes how he 'cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. [...] in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me' (C.C. p. 61). Trapped in a sphere somewhere between this world and the next, Marley pays the ultimate price for his past wrongdoings: as in Bulwer Lytton's and Catherine Crowe's narratives, there is the suggestion that the soul endures after death. Dickens's treatment of the supernatural draws attention to issues of morality and death, evoking an almost religious tone as the tale unfolds.

Throughout *A Christmas Carol*, the repeated emphasis on death cannot be ignored. The narrative opens with the phrase 'Marley was dead: to begin with' (C.C. p. 45), setting the scene for what is to come while constructing a dark and foreboding atmosphere. The tension between life, death and the unknown after-life troubles the text, as do its presentation of the tormented spectres. Yet there is more to this short story. Placed in its pre-Darwinian context, the Christian imagery is striking,²⁴⁰ occurring in relation to the most unexpected of characters to complicate and subvert any straightforward ghostly depiction:

It [the Ghost of Christmas Past] was a strange figure – like a child; yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having [...] a child's proportions. [...] It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful [...] from its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light. (C.C. p. 68)

²⁴⁰ In contrast to Edgar Johnson's article '*A Christmas Carol* Criticizes England's Economic System' in *Readings on Charles Dickens*, ed Clarice Swisher (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1997), pp. 86-93 which states that '[n]ot that Christmas has for Dickens more than the very smallest connection with Christian dogma' (p. 87), I will be arguing that Christian imagery subtly but insistently informs the overt, central narrative.

The language seems to consciously blend the supernatural with religious imagery, evoking a strange sense that this spirit is angelic. Such hints of purity, child-like innocence and godly radiance continue as the narrative develops with repeated emphasis on the suggestively halo-like 'light upon its head' (C.C. p. 78) which illuminates Scrooge's bedroom 'in an unbroken flood' (C.C. p. 84). Additionally, when Scrooge begs the spirit to cover its beam of light, the ghost exclaims, "'would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give?'" (C.C. p. 69). This draws upon a traditionally Christian vocabulary – which was frequently manipulated by other Victorian figures such as William Holman Hunt whose later Pre-Raphaelite painting, *The Light of the World* (1853-4), symbolically depicts Jesus with a lantern of hope – to produce a subtle, yet powerful connection between the apparently polar opposites of Christianity and the Gothic.

But not all the religious symbolism in *A Christmas Carol* is saintly. Although the Christmas season, a time when the birth of Christ is the focal point, foregrounds the positive Christian aspects of the tale, the text also works to emphasise the Christian idea of Hell as well as Heaven. A Hellish atmosphere is ever present as the language self-consciously draws upon the stereotypical vocabulary and imagery of damnation, particularly noticeable in Marley's unwelcome appearance:

There was something very awful, too, in the spectre's being provided with an infernal atmosphere of its own. Scrooge could not feel it himself, but this was clearly the case; for though the Ghost sat perfectly motionless, its hair, and skirts, and tassels, were ignited as by the hot vapour from an oven. (C.C. p. 60)

Mental anguish is overtaken by physical pain in what is described as the ghost's '[i]ncessant torture of remorse' (C.C. p. 62). More specifically, the symbolic reference to an 'infernal atmosphere' and 'hot vapour' surrounding the spirit draws parallels

with the language and imagery of the Book of Revelations.²⁴¹ Similarly to Edward Bulwer Lytton's occult *Zanoni* – whose demonic Dweller of the Threshold is presented in Satanic terms – Dickens's text seems to be manipulating very obvious conventions; his narrative constantly echoes the words of the Scriptures. The language of sin simmers below the surface of the text; Scrooge is confronted by a 'judgement on him' (C.C. p. 115) during his brief but disturbing glimpse into his future when Peter Cratchit – the son of Scrooge's exploited office clerk Bob – directly quotes from the Gospel of Matthew.²⁴² It seems that the voice of child-like innocence is needed to speak the phrase ““And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them”” (C.C. p. 120), evoking Jesus's message of forgiveness and redemption while self-consciously using a capital letter to signify the presence of Christ. Perhaps predictably then, and in true fairytale fashion, the sinner is reformed. Scrooge's miraculous conversion to goodwill, generosity and a true love of Christmas suggests that Dickens's socio-supernatural short tale has successfully blended Gothic and Christian factors, moulding a narrative that would entertain and educate its Victorian readers. Regardless of *A Christmas Carol*'s immense popularity and ability to manipulate both religion and the paranormal, however, it seems that Dickens is not completely comfortable in his writing: his next three Christmas books demonstrate the fragile relationship that Charles Dickens seemed to experience between religion on the one hand and the supernatural, represented by the Gothic ghost story tradition on the other.

²⁴¹ The Book of the Revelation of John (also called the Apocalypse of John) is the last book of the New Testament. On a basic level, this complex book is full of apocalyptic imagery, detailing the earthly and spiritual conflict between good and evil forces whereby the Earth is destroyed and the righteous are taken to Heaven. For further information see, for example, Vardy's *Puzzle of Evil*.

²⁴² 'New Testament', *English Bible*, p. 17.

(iii)

After cementing his status as a popular Christmas author, Dickens needed to build upon this achievement, taking advantage of the lucrative Christmas market. What followed was another social commentary, *The Chimes: a Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year out and a New Year in* (1844), which sold twenty thousand copies in the first month after its publication.²⁴³ Illustrated by Daniel Maclise, Richard Doyle, John Leech and Clarkson Stanfield, the narrative centres on Trotty (Toby) Veck who works as a ticket porter outside a beloved church. Fantasy and patterns of realism are successfully placed side by side as Veck experiences a nightmare vision – in which the goblin spirits inside the church bell show him an image of his daughter's suffering at the hands of an uncaring and unjust society – which proves to be only a dream: Veck wakes up to a new year and hopeful future. Written during Dickens's continental travels, the idea for *The Chimes* was inspired by the author's deep irritation at the constant ringing of the Genoa bells. Nevertheless, as Michael Slater states, '*The Chimes*, with its intensely topical satire, was far more of an overt political manifesto than the *Carol*. Dickens was out to strike the heaviest blow [...] on behalf of the poor'.²⁴⁴ It is this radical element of the story which sparked a very mixed critical response.²⁴⁵ The Tory periodical *John Bull* remarked that 'Mr Dickens has

²⁴³ There is relatively little criticism on *The Chimes* as much of the research into Dickens's *Christmas Books* focuses on *A Christmas Carol*. However, for more information see, Burton R. Pollin's 'Dickens' *Chimes* and its Pathways into Poe's "Bells"', *Mississippi Quarterly*, n.s. 51:2 (1998), pp. 217-33; Michael Shelden, 'Dickens, "The Chimes", and the Anti-Corn Law League', *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 25 (1982), pp. 329-53; Michael Slater, 'Dickens (and Forster) at Work on *The Chimes*', *Dickens Studies*, n.s. 2 (1966), pp. 106-40; Michael Slater, 'Carlyle and Jerrold into Dickens: A Study of *The Chimes*', *Nineteenth Century Fiction*, n.s. 24 (1970), pp. 506-26; Louis Cazamian, 'Dickens's Philosophy of Christmas' in *Readings on Charles Dickens*, ed. Clarice Swisher (San Diego: Greenhaven, 1997), pp. 82-85.

²⁴⁴ Michael Slater, 'Introduction to *The Chimes*' in *The Christmas Books: A Christmas Carol. The Chimes* (London: Penguin, 1985), I, pp. 137-41 (p. 138).

²⁴⁵ Norman Page in *A Dickens Companion* gives examples of 'the story's topicality [such as] [...] the references to treating suicide as a crime (Sir Peter Laurie's campaign to achieve this, launched in 1841, had caused much controversy); to infanticide (the recent case of Mary Furley, sentenced in April 1844, had caused a public outcry' (p. 257).

produced a work every way unworthy of himself. Its spirit is detestable' before condemning the fact that Dickens has 'condescended to pander to the low Radical doctrine of the day as regards the poor, by holding up to ridicule [...] the efforts of the higher classes to ameliorate their condition'.²⁴⁶ While this right-wing response is far from surprising, what is more unexpected are Bulwer Lytton's negative observations about Dickens's work: Michael Slater comments on an unpublished letter from Bulwer Lytton to John Forster which scathingly states of *The Chimes* that 'its moral is untrue and dangerous'.²⁴⁷ But Bulwer Lytton's opinion was not that of the majority. Praise flowed from reviewers such as the *Examiner*'s Leigh Hunt who declared that Dickens 'never wrote anything more beautiful, more pitiful, more full of truth and deepest tenderness'.²⁴⁸ while the *Illustrated London News* stated that *The Chimes* 'must be hailed as a well-timed production, likely to realize the most beneficial results in society'.²⁴⁹ Although the contemporary reaction to this new Christmas story was certainly mixed, Dickens's decision to adhere to many of the popular social realist characteristics of *A Christmas Carol* suggests that the readers received exactly what they wanted: a slightly newer version of the *Carol* with the same narrative technique of manipulating the paranormal to express a Christmas message, albeit one more overtly political, of peace and harmony. Ultimately, Dickens manipulates a supernatural discourse for entertainment purposes.

In the manner of *A Christmas Carol*, *The Chimes* once more conforms to a ghost story tradition. The narrative immediately sets a Gothic scene, constructing a stereotypically eerie atmosphere: 'It [the wind around the church] has a ghostly sound

²⁴⁶ Anon., 'The Chimes: a Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year out and a New Year in, By Charles Dickens.—Chapman and Hall', *John Bull*, 28 December 1844, p. 225.

²⁴⁷ Slater, 'Introduction to *The Chimes*', p. 139.

²⁴⁸ Leigh Hunt, 'The Chimes', *Examiner*, 21 December 1844, pp. 803-05 (p. 805).

²⁴⁹ Anon., 'The Chimes', *Illustrated London News*, 21 December 1844, pp. 394-95 (p. 395).

too, lingering within the alter; where it seems to chaunt, in its wild way, of Wrong and Murder done, and false Gods worshipped'.²⁵⁰ Death, paganism and a ghostly sensation invade the text, preventing any comfortable reading: this is clearly a story which resists any straightforward fairytale framework. Furthermore, this unsettling description is set in a Christian place of worship. By distorting the portrayal of something traditionally safe and sacred, the narrative symbolically makes space for further upheaval: the church is transformed into a ghostly space. This comes in the shape of Trotty Veck's night-time wanderings. During his dream trance, Veck seems mesmerically drawn to the deserted church, only to find himself overwhelmed by a variety of supernatural creatures:

He saw the tower, wither his charmed footsteps had brought him, swarming with dwarf phantoms, spirits, elfin creatures of the Bells. He saw them leaping, flying, dropping, pouring from the Bells without pause. He saw them [...] ugly, handsome, crippled, exquisitely formed. He saw them young he saw them old, he saw them kind, he saw them cruel. (C. p. 201)

This image of excess reiterates the horror of the preternatural scenes, resembling Bulwer Lytton's later short story *The Haunted and the Haunters*, in which the narrator is confronted by a demonic shadow which is crawling with evil creatures devouring each other. Dickens adheres to a Gothic framework of unpredictable and indistinguishable preternatural goblins: Veck witnesses the creatures interacting and interfering with 'not only [...] sleeping men but waking also, active in pursuits irreconcilable with one another' (C. p. 202). Significantly, therefore, the boundaries separating the world of the living and the supernatural are challenged: the two seem to interact, with the goblin creatures in unchallenged control. Just as in the spiritualist idea that the spirit world is entangled with reality, so Dickens seems intent on

²⁵⁰ Charles Dickens, *The Chimes* in *The Christmas Books: A Christmas Carol, The Chimes*, ed. Michael Slater (London: Penguin, 1985), I, p. 150. All further references to *The Chimes* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis with the abbreviation C.

weaving the supernatural into his social realism.²⁵¹ In contrast to the various human ghosts which haunt *A Christmas Carol*, however, the unsettling appearance of the Goblin of the Chimes, the largest and most malevolent of the goblins in the narrative, has more in common with *The Haunted and the Haunters*' shadowy nemesis. The Goblin's 'spectral hand' (C. p. 203) and 'eyes that would have waked and watched although the pupils had been taken out' (C. p. 203) conveys an image of surveillance very much associated with Gothic tales. Although, as Marilyn J. Kurata discusses, the 'The Chimes superimposes an explicit appeal for recognition of man's common humanity in a tale about an elderly gentleman who experiences supernatural visions',²⁵² the paranormal elements cannot be ignored.

Yet *The Chimes* differs from its predecessor in many ways: unlike *A Christmas Carol*'s subtle yet influential Christian allusions, *The Chimes* lacks any significant religious elements. Although the narrative is essentially focused upon a church, its moralising message seems to stifle any religious signifiers. Nevertheless, before the supernaturally inspired Goblin of the Chimes appears, the church bells do act as spiritual reminders:

As he was stopping to sit down, the Chimes rang. "Amen!" said Trotty, pulling off his hat and looking up towards them. "Amen to the Bells, father?" cried Meg. "They broke in like a grace, my dear" said Trotty, taking his seat. "They'd say a good one, I am sure, if they could. Many's the kind thing they say to me." (C. p. 161)

²⁵¹ Podmore in *Mediums of the Nineteenth Century*, I, comments that '[o]n the 2 February 1834, the housebells at Bealings, near Woodbridge, in Suffolk [...] began to ring violently – sometimes singly, sometimes three or more together – without any apparent cause [...] they were inexplicable by any cause known to science' (p. 29). This event occurred only ten years prior to the 1844 publication of *The Chimes* and has clear links to Dickens's Christmas story.

²⁵² Marilyn J. Kurata, 'Fantasy and Realism: A Defence of *The Chimes*', *Dickens Studies Annual*, n.s. 13 (1984), pp. 19-34 (p. 21)

The poor and uneducated Veck takes comfort from the church bells, interpreting their ringing as prayer-like: a Christian sense of hope informs the scene as the bell is presented as almost a guardian angel for the suffering man below. Additionally at the close of the Christmas story, and when Veck is enduring the ghostly dream-vision of his daughter's future suffering and thoughts of infanticide, the narrator pauses over the Tory figure of Alderman Cute. At this point, the language used to express the radical morality blurs the boundaries between the secular and spiritual:

What Alderman! [...] Remember, Justice, your high moral boast and pride [...] Throw me into this, the empty one, No Dinner, and Nature's Founts in some woman, dried by starving misery and rendered obdurate to claims for which her offspring has authority in holy mother Eve. Weigh me the two: Daniel, going to judgement, when your day shall come! (C. p. 212)

As in Scrooge's fear of eternal suffering for his past conduct, *The Chimes* also alludes to biblical imagery and, significantly, it is the book of Revelations which is again most influential. Judgement is the key word as the narrator addresses the controversial topic of infanticide, radically appealing to the reader's social conscience in the hope of understanding and sympathy. Regardless of the passionately moralising tone of the story, however, the religious aspects never gain supremacy. The supernatural imagery controls the narrative, preventing any distinctly Christian elements from surfacing. This weakened religious content is further diminished in the next Christmas story, arguably in parallel with the weakening of Dickens's own religious faith.

Following the unexpected success of *A Christmas Carol* and *The Chimes*, Dickens yielded to public demand and started work on his third Christmas story, *The Cricket of the Hearth: A Fairy Tale of Home* (1845).²⁵³ As John Butt explains:

²⁵³ Similarly to *The Chimes*, *The Cricket on the Hearth* has fallen into obscurity with both modern readers and critics. However, there have been a few critical studies of the text such as Sylvia Manning's 'Dickens, January, and May', *Dickensian*, n.s. 71 (1975), pp. 67-75 which explores the

Dickens appears to have had *The Cricket* in mind rather longer than the other books, for though he did not begin it until mid-October 1845 he had told Foster early in July of that year that he thought it would be 'a delicate and beautiful fancy for a Christmas book, making the Cricket a little household god – silent in the wrong and sorrow of the tale, and loud again when all went well and happy'.²⁵⁴

By contrast to Dickens's earlier Christmas stories, there are no haunting spectres, no dream-like sequences and no social injustices dominating the narrative: the plot of *The Cricket on the Hearth* is simple and domestic. The home and marital happiness of John Perrybingle and his wife Dot is threatened when the discontented toymaker, Tackleton, places doubt about Dot's love and fidelity in the mind of her husband. When John sees his wife embracing a young man who has disguised himself as a haggard wayfarer, he is consumed by rage. Luckily, the angelic Cricket comes to life, intervening to clear the misunderstanding. The disguised man is, in fact, Edward Plummer who has returned to foil Tackleton's scheme to marry Plummer's sweetheart May Fielding, allowing domestic harmony to prevail. As Ruth Glancy comments, 'the *Cricket* is [...] unmistakably Victorian in its sentimental plot and style. Contemporary reviewers fell into two distinct camps, either praising the book [...] or castigating it'.²⁵⁵ For example, favourable reviews flowed from the *Observer*, who considered the Cricket to be 'equal to the best of the author's productions',²⁵⁶ and the *Atlas* periodical whose critic preferred the 'fireside happiness'²⁵⁷ of the *Cricket* to its

various age differences between the three couples in the text, comparing it to Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale* as well as Dickens's own relationship with younger women. Also, Kathleen Tillotson's 'Lewis Carroll and the Kitten on the Hearth', *English*, n.s. 8 (1950), pp. 136-38 explores the influence of *The Cricket* on *Through the Looking Glass* while Earle Davis's *The Flint and the Flame: The Artistry of Charles Dickens* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1964) comments that the Dot-John relationship is the precursor to Dr. Strong and Annie's relationship in *David Copperfield* (1850). Moreover, Scott Moncrieff's 'The Cricket in the Study', *Dickens Studies Annual*, n.s. 22 (1993), pp. 137-53 focuses on the treatment of sexual politics while Elisabeth G. Gitter's 'The Blind Daughter in Charles Dickens's *Cricket on the Hearth*', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, n.s. 39:4 (Autumn 1999), pp. 675-89 examines the literary tradition of blindness and ocular cure in the Victorian short story.

²⁵⁴ Butt, *Pope, Dickens and Others*, p. 141.

²⁵⁵ Glancy, *An Annotated Bibliography*, p. xxiii.

²⁵⁶ Anon., 'Mr. Dickens's New Work', *Observer*, 21 December 1845, p. 5.

²⁵⁷ Anon., 'The Cricket on the Hearth', *Atlas*, 27 December 1845, p. 836.

predecessor. Additionally, the Tory *John Bull*, which had so categorically dismissed *The Chimes*, remarked that such is the power which 'Mr. Dickens exercises over his readers, that he excites as lively an interest for these purely imaginary persons, as if they were [...] characters of [...] Sir Walter Scott'.²⁵⁸ Nevertheless, such praise was quickly followed by censure, with the *Morning Post* publishing a hostile account of Dickens's work in general but citing the *Cricket* as one of the worst offenders²⁵⁹ while *The Times* labelled it as a 'twaddling manifestation of silliness'.²⁶⁰ Moreover, William M. Thackeray, also famous for his Christmas narratives, advises his readers to enjoy *The Cricket on the Hearth* as a pantomime but declares how he longs for the return of Dickens's 'early and simple manner'.²⁶¹ But, whatever the reviews, *The Cricket on the Hearth* was incredibly popular with the Victorian public. The novella completely outsold both *A Christmas Carol* and *The Chimes* while a stage production of the story ran simultaneously in seventeen London theatres.²⁶² It seems that the domestic subject proved to be a much bigger attraction to his contemporary readers.

The Cricket on the Hearth: A Fairy Tale of Home is Dickens's clearest attempt at reconstructing a fairy tale for his Victorian audience: the very title labels the Christmas book as part of this distinct genre and, as with most fairy stories, there must be some form of magical event which transforms the narrative. *The Cricket* is no exception. The supernatural elements are an intrinsic part of the domestic set-up, with the cricket in the Perrybingle home acting as a variation of the fairy godmother. Interestingly, however, this does not seem to be a completely new idea. Dickens's

²⁵⁸ Anon., 'The Cricket on the Hearth; A Fairy Tale of Home. By Charles Dickens.—Bradbury and Evans', *John Bull*, 3 January 1846, p. 308.

²⁵⁹ Anon., 'The Cricket on the Hearth', *Morning Post*, 22 December 1845, p. 3.

²⁶⁰ Samuel Phillips, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', *The Times*, 27 December 1845, p. 6.

²⁶¹ William M. Thackeray, 'The Cricket on the Hearth', *Morning Chronicle*, 23 December 1845, p. 5.

²⁶² Glancy, *An Annotated Bibliography*, p. xxiii.

earlier publication, *Master Humphrey's Clock* (1840-41) – a threepenny weekly magazine containing short papers and a continuous story which, as John Sutherland notes, 'Dickens [...] optimistically hoped would serve as the flexible framework for his fiction and other writing in small units'²⁶³ – has familiar features, suggesting that it is almost a precursor to his third Christmas story. Indeed, Master Humphrey refers to the comfort and domestic tranquillity that his grandfather clock provides, remarking 'what other thing [...] could cheer me as it does? [...] often have I sat in the long winter evenings feeling such society in its cricket-voice'.²⁶⁴ In both *Master Humphrey's Clock* and *The Cricket on the Hearth*, the cricket imagery is non-threatening: the clock and the cricket in the Christmas fairy tale are portrayed as guardian angels of the homestead. More specifically, with regard to the *Cricket*, the supernatural imagery which invades the text lacks any suggestion of the Gothic. Dot describes how it is 'the luckiest thing in the all the world'²⁶⁵ to have a cricket, presenting the creature as a family charm while, even at the most dramatic moment, when domesticity is threatened, the cricket merely stands in 'Fairy shape' (*C.H.* p. 148) before John to erase his fears and doubts:

"All things that speak the language of your hearth and home, must plead for her!" returned the cricket. [...] from the hearthstone, from the chimney, from the clock, the pipe, the kettle and the cradle [...] Fairies came trooping forth [...] to do honour to her image. (*C.H.* p. 249)

In stark contrast to *A Christmas Carol* and *The Chimes*, therefore, no haunting spectres are needed to shock the protagonist into action and remorse. The 'Household Spirits' (*C.H.* p. 251) which gently plead Dot's innocence are the only apparitions to

²⁶³ Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction*, p. 420.

²⁶⁴ Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood and Master Humphrey's Clock* (London: Heron, 1967), p. 308.

²⁶⁵ Charles Dickens, *Christmas Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 194. All further references to *The Cricket on the Hearth* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the body of the thesis with the abbreviation *C.H.*

invade the narrative and these magical creatures are portrayed as being a part of the fabric of home: no Hell-like imagery of suffering souls returning from purgatory is necessary and Gothic tropes are absolutely absent. *The Cricket on the Hearth* is a very straightforward text: its title is the extent of its complexity.

The sentimentality which defined *The Cricket on the Hearth*, and which arguably helped secure its popularity with the Victorian public, is a far cry from the dark and ghostly features of *A Christmas Carol* and *The Chimes*. I suggest that Charles Dickens was moving away from using supernatural agency as a means of expressing his morally charged message of social equality. Yet, while the *Cricket*'s insistence on the sanctity of the home seems a little sedate for the ever-controversial Dickens, its uncharacteristic sentimentality was nothing compared to his fourth Christmas story. Published for the Christmas market of 1846, *The Battle of Life: A Love Story* is, as Katherine Carolan observes, 'impossibly romantic'²⁶⁶ and proved to be a complete failure in every respect for Dickens and his publishers.²⁶⁷ John Butt discusses how:

The Battle of Life, [is] a story of domestic unselfishness, in which the younger of two sisters [Marion] leaves her home because she is brought to recognize that her elder sister [Grace] conceals a love for the man whom the younger sister is engaged to marry. The trouble here [...] was that he [Dickens] had chosen too short a form in which to elaborate a theme requiring lengthy treatment.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Katherine Carolan, 'The Battle of Life: A Love Story', *Dickensian*, n.s. 69 (1973), pp. 105-10

²⁶⁷ For further critical works on *The Battle of Life* see Peter Conrad's *The Victorian Treasure-House* (London: Collins, 1973) which argues that Dickens made the heroes boring and the minor characters interesting to stall the plot. Also, Frank A. Gibson's 'Nature's Possible: A Reconsideration of *The Battle of Life*', *Dickensian*, n.s. 58 (1962), pp. 43-46 which defends the book, stating that the Christmas genre has the space for idealisation. Nevertheless, the most in-depth analysis is Katherine Carolan's 'The Battle of Life: A Love Story', *Dickensian*, n.s. 69 (1973), pp. 105-10 who points out the Christian influences upon the Christmas story, emphasising that Dickens was also working on *The Life of Our Lord* at the same time.

²⁶⁸ Butt, *Pope, Dickens and Others*, p. 143.

The complicated plot is nothing more than a twisted love-triangle which, like *The Cricket on the Hearth*, foregrounds the importance of the Victorian home. Dickens's own fascination with sisterly love and his well-documented affection for Mary and Georgina Hogarth whilst married to their sister Catherine, suggestively controls the narrative structure. In spite of the autobiographical features, however, the fact that this Christmas book has, as Ruth Glancy emphasises, 'never been regarded as anything except a failure'²⁶⁹ is significant. What is even more surprising is that his fourth Christmas Book is 'not located at any special season, and [...] has no formal connection with Christmas at all'²⁷⁰ which goes some way to explaining why the reviewers of *The Battle of Life* turned upon its much-loved author. The critic for the *Morning Post* labelled the book as 'stale and vapid'²⁷¹ while *The Times* again unleashed a barrage of criticism, remarking that the story is simply a 'deluge of trash'.²⁷² There were, however, a few genuine compliments. Marston J. Westland, writing for the *Athenaeum*, declared that it was 'poetical in both its treatment and its aim'²⁷³ which was also a comment reiterated by the *London Journal* whose reviewer praised the work as 'a real book of beauty'.²⁷⁴ Despite the scattering of compliments, the story remained widely disliked: even the heart-felt references to domesticity could not save *The Battle of Life* from falling into literary oblivion.

The Battle of Life's incessant sentimentality makes for uncomfortable reading. Although this fourth Christmas story attempted to build upon *The Cricket*'s awareness of 'hearth and home', the tangled romance inadvertently distorts the very feature that

²⁶⁹ Glancy, *An Annotated Bibliography*, p. xxv.

²⁷⁰ Jackson, *Progress of a Radical*, p. 288.

²⁷¹ Anon., 'The Battle of Life: A Love Story', *Morning Post*, 21 December 1846, p. 6.

²⁷² Samuel Phillips, 'The Battle of Life', *The Times*, 2 January 1847, p. 6.

²⁷³ Marston J. Westland, 'The Battle of Life', *Athenaeum*, 26 December 1846, pp. 1319-21 (p. 1320).

²⁷⁴ Anon., 'The Battle of Life', *London Journal*, 9 January 1847, pp. 278-79 (p. 278).

the public adored: domesticity in *The Battle for Life* is, essentially, destroyed. Although the clichéd ending attempts to reunite the broken family and restore domestic harmony, the home seems beyond repair. After Marion Jeddler pretends to elope on the eve of her wedding to Arthur Heathfield, the entire family falls apart. Her father, Dr. Anthony Jeddler, becomes 'grey and old, and hasn't the same way with him at all'²⁷⁵ before contemplating selling the old family house. The memories attached to the building torment the broken man who is left behind with his eldest daughter, Grace, as they grieve 'together, and remembered her together, like a person dead' (*B.L.* p. 351). The language persistently alludes to the home as broken. Even marginal characters such as the attorneys, Mr. Snitchey and Mr. Craggs, are forced to endure marital and domestic discord:

Snitchey and Craggs were the best friends in the world, and had a real confidence in one another; but Mrs. Snitchey, by a dispensation not uncommon in the affairs of life, was on principle suspicious of Mr. Craggs; and Mrs. Craggs was on principle suspicious of Mr. Snitchey. (*B.L.* p. 308)

Suspicion, discord and discontent shape this description, jarring with Dot and John Perrybingle's belief in the sanctity of marriage in *The Cricket on the Hearth*. There is a sense, therefore, that the entire narrative revolves around domestic tensions: although *The Battle of Life* is, on the surface, a love story its juxtaposition of love with suffering creates an unsettling atmosphere. Even though the idealised representation of sisterly affection is, at times, moving, the coherence of the narrative falls apart. Surprisingly, the only element that retains any stability seems to be the religious connotations that persistently shape the narrative.

²⁷⁵ Charles Dickens, *Christmas Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 350. All further references to *The Battle of Life* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the body of the thesis with the abbreviation *B.L.*

One thing that is striking with regard to the few Christian references in *The Battle of Life*, is that they predominantly occur in relation to the female servant Clemency Newcome: similarly to Hardy's later works, her mixture of orthodox religion and rural superstition is noticeable, creating an image of a quasi-Christian adherence. This is apparent when she comes into contact with Snitchey and Cragg. Grace explains to the two men how Clemency cherishes mundane articles which bear 'an engraved motto, and so formed [...] [her] pocket library' (*B.L.* p. 300). Importantly, each sacred item is kept in her pocket along with 'a lucky penny, [and] a cramp bone' (*B.L.* p. 301), signifiers of omens, charms and irrationality. But the etching on each item symbolically bears a scriptural allusion. For example, Clemency tells the men that her household nutmeg-grater is marked with the phrase 'Do as you – would – be – done by' (*B.L.* p. 302). Although the uneducated woman is almost unable to read the proverb, it is still significant that the object echoes the Gospel of Matthew.²⁷⁶ Likewise, her thimble carries the phrase 'For-get and Forgive' (*B.L.* p. 301), again drawing upon New Testament references to the Gospel of Luke.²⁷⁷ Katherine Carolan goes as far as to argue that in *The Battle of Life* there is 'a concern with religion unequalled in other Christmas stories'.²⁷⁸ Written while Dickens was also working on his New Testament-based work, *The Life of Our Lord*, Carolan suggests that in light of 'Dickens's interest in religion at the time, the persistent [...] allusions and suggestions in the book can [...] be seen as the products of a genuine religious impulse'.²⁷⁹ Regardless of Dickens's own faith, however, the knowledge that his fourth Christmas tale lacks any allusion to the paranormal, any direct reference to Christmas and any real attempt to portray domesticity is telling. While covert

²⁷⁶ 'New Testament', *English Bible*, p. 6.

²⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 56.

²⁷⁸ Carolan, 'The Battle', *Dickensian*, p. 105.

²⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 110.

Christian references can be found in his previous Christmas works, the public outcry over the sickly sentimentality of *The Battle of Life* forced Dickens into action. As Ruth Glancy emphasises, 'Dickens himself realised that without the supernatural machinery of the first three books he could not work out his plot within the limits of the Christmas book form'.²⁸⁰ As a result, his fifth and final Christmas work was an attempt to correct this error. Dickens self-consciously reverts back to the paranormal features of *A Christmas Carol* in the hope of reaffirming his position as the most successful Christmas author of the Victorian period.

(iv)

The last of Charles Dickens's *Christmas Books* did not directly follow the 1846 publication of *The Battle for Life*. Uncharacteristically, Dickens was feeling the strain of the serial instalments of *Dombey and Son* and, as a result of this commitment and the lukewarm reception of *The Battle for Life* which arguably cooled Dickens's enthusiasm for the genre, did not produce a Christmas story in 1847. John Forster notes how 'his fancy for his Christmas book of 1848 first arose to him in the summer of 1846, and that, after writing its opening pages in the autumn of the following year, he laid it aside'.²⁸¹ Nevertheless, six months after the close of *Dombey and Son* in April 1848, and free from the pressure of novel-writing, Dickens began his fifth Christmas tale, *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain: A Fancy for Christmas Time* (1848) which, as Thomas Alfred Jackson notes, marks the author's 'return to the semi-supernaturalistic method of the first of the series'.²⁸² On a basic level, the

²⁸⁰ Glancy, *An Annotated Bibliography*, p. xxv.

²⁸¹ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, II, p. 59.

²⁸² Jackson, *Progress of a Radical*, p. 288. For further critical works on *The Haunted Man* see Helen Groth's 'Reading Victorian Illusions: Dickens's *Haunted Man* and Dr Pepper's "Ghost"', *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 50:1 (Autumn 2007), pp. 43-65, which examines John Henry Pepper's Successful 1862 stage adaptation of the story, and Tick Stanley's 'Autobiographical Impulses in *The Haunted Man*

narrative centres on the chemist Redlaw who is metaphorically haunted by his inescapable remembrance of his own past: he bears the emotional scars from the death of his beloved sister and the elopement of his best friend with his own fiancée. Tormented by a brooding *doppelgänger* – a ghostly double and a phenomenon which Catherine Crowe is preoccupied with analysing and understanding in *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) – Redlaw strikes a bargain with the spectre on Christmas Eve in which all of his unhappy recollections will fade. With this contract, however, comes a penalty in the form of what Jenny Herron terms as a ‘contagious forgetfulness that afflicts everybody he meets, with a single fortunate exception [...] Redlaw’s faithful domestic, Milly Swidger’²⁸³ whose good heart helps to restore memory. Even with his return to supernatural techniques in *The Haunted Man*, however, the book could not match the unprecedented popularity of *A Christmas Carol*. Although Forster claims that the text ‘sold largely, beginning with a subscription of twenty thousand; and had a great success on the Adelphi stage, to which it was rather cleverly adapted by [Mark] Lemon’,²⁸⁴ the critics were still divided. The *Morning Post* criticised both Dickens’s text and Lemon’s dramatisation, concluding that the book consists of ‘vague metaphysics and dreamy ethics’²⁸⁵ with no real substance. Likewise, the critic for the *Spectator* compares *The Haunted Man* with Thackeray’s Christmas book, *Dr. Birch and His Young Friends* only to find Dickens’s text lacking in depth and clarity,

(1848)’, *Dickens Quarterly*, n.s. 18:2 (June 2001), pp. 62-69 which links Dickens’s use of memory with his own childhood experiences and compares this Christmas tale to autobiographical elements of *David Copperfield* (1850). The treatment of memory is also the focus of Scott Moncrieff’s ‘Remembrance of Wrongs Past in *The Haunted Man*’, *Studies in Short Fiction*, n.s. 28:4 (1991), pp. 535-41 who argues that Dickens’s work cannot be isolated from his own personal experiences. However, possibly the best critical analysis on *The Haunted Man* is Wendy K. Carse’s ‘Domestic Transformations in Dickens’ *The Haunted Man*’, *Dickens Studies Annual*, n.s. 23 (1994), pp. 163-81. In this work, Carse explores the treatment of transformation in domesticity, suggesting that ‘[a]ll images of home, in fact, coalesce to form in Milly the very source of Redlaw’s transformation’ (p. 164).

²⁸³ Jenny Herron, ‘The Haunted Man and the Two Scrooges’, *Studies in Short Fiction*, n.s. 19 (1982), pp. 45-50 (p. 46).

²⁸⁴ Forster, *Life of Charles Dickens*, II, p. 59.

²⁸⁵ Anon., ‘The Haunted Man’, *Morning Post*, 21 December 1848, p. 5.

stating that ‘[s]o far as we can comprehend its aim, *The Haunted Man* is intended to impress the superiority of kindly feelings over abstruse knowledge’.²⁸⁶ There is a sense that its lack of social realism, the element which had excited critics of *A Christmas Carol*, *The Chimes* and *The Cricket*, affected its popularity. Nevertheless, praise did come in the shape of the *Morning Herald* who claimed Dickens to be the ‘high priest of the household gods’²⁸⁷ and from *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* which condemns the harshness of the other critics before stating that *The Haunted Man* was the equal of *A Christmas Carol*.²⁸⁸

The Haunted Man marks a return to *A Christmas Carol* in more ways than one. Unlike *The Chimes*, *The Cricket on the Hearth* and *The Battle for Life*, Dickens’s fifth and final Christmas tale reverts back to the technique of mixing supernatural agency with subtle scientific references for entertainment value. Perhaps the most obvious signifier is the protagonist’s profession: frequently described as simply ‘The Chemist’;²⁸⁹ Redlaw’s position is firmly rooted inside the world of scientific rationality.²⁹⁰ Described as ‘a learned man in chemistry, and a teacher on whose lips and hands a crowd of aspiring ears and eyes hung daily’ (*H.M.* p. 374) he differs from

²⁸⁶ Anon., ‘Dickens’s Haunted Man’, *Spectator*, 23 December 1848, pp. 1236-37 (p. 1237).

²⁸⁷ Anon., ‘The Haunted Man’, *Morning Herald*, 18 December 1848, p. 5.

²⁸⁸ Anon., ‘The Haunted Man’, *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 24 December 1848, p. 8.

²⁸⁹ Charles Dickens, *Christmas Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 415. All further references to *The Haunted Man* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the body of the thesis with the abbreviation *H.M.*

²⁹⁰ Importantly, Frank M. Turner’s ‘The Victorian Conflict Between Science and Religion: A Professional Dimension’, *Religion in Victorian Britain: Interpretations*, ed. Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), IV, pp. 170-97 reiterates the significance of holding the position of a science teacher in mid-Victorian society, stating that ‘[f]rom the 1840s onward the size, character, structure, ideology, and leadership of the Victorian scientific world underwent considerable transformation and eventually emerged possessing most of the characteristics associated with a modern scientific community. Between 1850 and 1880 the memberships of all the major scientific societies markedly increased, with many of them doubling their numbers. [...] In 1850 there were seventeen physics professors and two other faculty members teaching physics in the United Kingdom. By 1880 the figures had risen to twenty-eight and twenty-two respectively. The number of chemistry professors in 1850 was eleven, with four other chemistry faculty members. By 1880 the university chemistry faculties had expanded to twenty-five professors and thirty-four other instructors.’ (p. 178)

Scrooge, with his self-inflicted isolation as a man who is driven by greed into a selfish and lonely existence. By contrast, Redlaw is isolated through fate. Tormented by the memory of past injustices, this man builds a life around his chemistry students, mixing human interaction with his passion for science. But it is exactly this scientific domain which becomes most unnerving as the supernatural aspects intensify:

who that had seen him there, upon a winter's night, alone, surrounded by his drugs and instruments and books: the shadow of his shaded lamp a monstrous beetle on the wall, motionless among a crowd of spectral shapes [...] some of these phantoms (the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids), trembling at heart like things that knew his power to uncombine them, and give them back their component parts to fire and vapour. (*H.M.* p. 374)

In the moments before the haunting shadow materialises in a 'likeness of himself' (*H.M.* p. 389) it is the scientific equipment around the man, as opposed to Redlaw himself which is transformed. The laboratory becomes ghostly and inanimate objects become spectral, creating the same type of haunted atmosphere which Scrooge experiences prior to the first Christmas Spirit, but with a scientific twist. The narrative repeatedly strives to retain a scientific framework. Even when Redlaw has sealed his bargain with the ghost, he cannot separate himself from chemistry. As he becomes ever more aware of and horrified by his power to erase memory, he articulates this supernaturally generated power in medical terms: "Give me back *myself*!" exclaimed Redlaw like a madman. "I am infected! I am infectious! I am charged with poison for my own mind, and the minds of all mankind" (*H.M.* p. 426). Redlaw can only comprehend what is happening by using medical discourse: his body is presented as being diseased and corrupted by his paranormal experience. Driven to the brink of insanity by the haunting spectre which will not leave his side, it is significantly his scientific rationality which seems to prevent him falling even deeper into madness: his medical awareness averts a Faustian dependence on the paranormal.

Redlaw's scientific knowledge cannot stop the inevitable. This, as the title foretells, is a tale of a 'ghost's bargain' and in order for Dickens to recreate the success of the *Carol*, he must work within the supernatural tradition. The longsuffering chemist's 'wild and unearthly' (*H.M.* p. 422) countenance is present for almost the entire narrative: he is a troubled man before the story even begins and is only released from the spectre's control at the close of the story. Predictably, traditional Gothic tropes are present, beginning with the eerie 'twilight' (*H.M.* p. 376) surroundings which 'released the shadows, prisoned up all day, that now closed in and gathered like mustering swarms of ghosts' (*H.M.* p. 376). The twilight atmosphere – an ambiguous, liminal time between day and night, light and dark and, in this case, human and supernatural – is coupled with an implied onslaught of apparitions. Moreover, the 'hollow cheek', 'sunken eye' and 'gloomy, shadowed [...] manner of [...] [the] haunted' (*H.M.* p. 373) Redlaw adds to the preternatural element, making *The Haunted Man* a typical ghost story in every respect. But there is more to this Christmas tale. In *A Christmas Carol* Dickens takes Scrooge on a ghostly journey through his own past, present and future, emphasising how the three Christmas Spirits are very much separate from the mortal figure of Scrooge. *The Haunted Man*, however, goes a step further, blurring the boundaries between man and phantom by focusing on the unsettling issue of doubling:

the haunted man turned, suddenly, and stared upon the Ghost. The Ghost, as sudden in its motion, passed to before the chair, and stared on him. The living man, and the animated image of himself dead, might so have looked, the one upon the other. (*H.M.* p. 390)

Moving in parallel, the apparition and Redlaw lose their separate identities, merging to become one. Furthermore, an emphasis on death suggests that it is the mortal who is shifting between earthly and Heavenly spheres, trapped somewhere between life and death and under the control of a powerful supernatural agency.

Similarly to Catherine Crowe's interest in a *doppelgänger* appearance when an individual is on the verge of death – something Charles Dickens would have been familiar with after favourably reviewing Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* only ten months prior to the publication of *The Haunted Man*²⁹¹ – Redlaw is confronted with an image of himself dead. Indeed, it is at this point that the narrative breaks from Crowe's research – which was based on empirical analysis – and falls into line with conventional occult fiction and, more specifically, Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni* (1846). Once again it is Bulwer Lytton's demonic Dweller of the Threshold who seems to have profoundly influenced Dickens. His description of an 'incessant whisper' (*H.M.* p. 394) and 'evil smile upon [...] [a] glassy face' (*H.M.* p. 394) emphasises how this ghost physically resembles the Dweller while Redlaw's cries of 'Tempter' (*H.M.* p. 394) again draws parallels between the bewitching elements of the two supernatural tormentors. Even Bulwer Lytton noticed and commentated on the similarities between Dickens's work and *Zanoni*. Sibylla Jane Flower again cites an unpublished letter to Foster when Bulwer Lytton states that 'I have no doubt that Dickens is not aware when he borrows even from me – which he does constantly in his style and manner of expressions', before going on to detail that '[c]ompare for instance p. 92-95 with any part of *Zanoni*'.²⁹² Even though Bulwer Lytton is referring to sections of *The Chimes*, the connection between his occult work and the Christmas story is significant. But what is even more surprising is that in *The Haunted Man*, as in Bulwer Lytton's occult work, an exorcism is needed. In order for the haunted chemist to receive the happy ending which the Christmas story tradition so ardently relied upon, some form of religious salvation must occur.

²⁹¹ See the Catherine Crowe section of Chapter One for Dickens's comments on *The Night Side of Nature* (1848).

²⁹² Flower, 'Charles Dickens and Edward Bulwer-Lytton', *Dickensian*, p. 84.

Throughout *The Haunted Man*, Redlaw seems to be on a spiritual quest. Ruth Glancy notes that '[w]ithout memory he becomes a man without a soul'²⁹³ and must learn spiritual understanding in order to regain memory and contentment. Before this can happen, however, he must come face-to-face with his own satanic nemesis. While the occult aspect of Redlaw's phantom is overt, there is an implication that Dickens's ghostly creation is not so clear cut:

Yes, I close the bargain. Yes! I WILL forget my sorrow, wrong and trouble! [...] The Phantom, which had held its bloodless hand above him while it spoke, as if in some unholy invocation, or some ban; and which had gradually advanced its eyes [...] close to his. (*H.M.* p. 396)

The tone and language unmistakably connects this nineteenth-century Christmas tale with conventional depictions of Faust.²⁹⁴ Dickens's supernatural tempter has its origins in the diabolical Mephistopheles of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1604) who convinces the mortal to give his soul to the Devil in exchange for magical knowledge. The religious nuances which engulf *The Haunted Man* are striking: Redlaw is positioned as conducting a demonic pact with the phantom in a style suggestive of Satan's tempting of Christ in the desert. Unlike his biblical counterpart, however, Redlaw succumbs to temptation: the complexities of the plot intensify as the now apparently soulless chemist is trapped by his prayer-like oath to the shadow. Presented as almost satanic himself, the cold-hearted Redlaw is unable to feel emotion when he 'look[s] up at the Heaven' (*H.M.* p. 431), symbolising his detachment from God, before actually envisaging 'himself as a demon' (*H.M.* p. 436) in his Christian surroundings. It seems that a form of possession has taken place with Redlaw

²⁹³ Glancy, 'Dickens and Christmas', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, p. 57.

²⁹⁴ Although the Faustian legend has been re-worked from many German sources – most notably by Goethe and Christopher Marlowe – what is important is the concept that Faust chooses human knowledge over the Divine by making a bargain with the Devil. Murray Baumgarten's 'Scrooge and Faust', *Dickensian*, n.s. 97 (2001), pp. 22-32 reflects on the sense of time and identity in both Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and Goethe's *Faust* but does not pay any attention to *The Haunted Man*. I argue that *The Haunted Man* is Dickens's most significant re-working of the Faustian bargain.

referring to the ghost as his [t]errible instructor' (*H.M.* p. 447) and pleading to the 'Spirit of my darker hours [...] [to] [c]ome back and [...] take this gift away' (*H.M.* p. 443). It appears that the damned man is seeking salvation: Redlaw realises that he is 'cursed' (*H.M.* p. 443), repents and subsequently pleads with the spectre for a transformation. The pact, however, is binding and cannot be undone by supernatural means: religion is shown to be the only means to achieve deliverance.

Redlaw's path to salvation is far from straightforward. In order to negate what John Butt terms as the chemist's 'Midas-touch of forgetfulness',²⁹⁵ he needs more than a simple declaration of repentance. After visiting the aptly named 'Jerusalem Buildings' (*H.M.* p. 402) and witnessing the suffering that his power has inflicted – bitterness and despair contaminate all those who the chemist comes into contact with – Redlaw's journey towards an exorcism begins. Aid comes in the form of Milly Swidger, a sort of mortal 'angel' who is 'used to set up a contrary motion' when the 'strength of her simple affections restores them [those touched by Redlaw] by bringing back their power of memory'.²⁹⁶ Immune from the ghost's gift, she becomes the unwitting redeemer of Redlaw's forfeited soul. Described in visibly Christian vocabulary, Milly is presented as the most 'innocent thing that ever lived on earth [...] like an angel' (*H.M.* p. 469) and is continually introduced to the reader as 'blessing' or speaking 'a prayer' (*H.M.* p. 458) for those in misfortune. With regard to Redlaw, moreover, her impact is powerful and swift: on Christmas Day he rejoices that 'I heard the children crying out your [Milly's] name, and the shade passed from me at the very sound of it' (*H.M.* p. 458), implying that childhood innocence combined with what Wendy K. Carse defines as 'the domestic Angel's possession of

²⁹⁵ Butt, *Pope, Dickens and Others*, p. 145.

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 145.

power', is more effective than any supernatural bargain.²⁹⁷ Furthermore, as the narrative progresses Milly's saviour-like qualities intensify, culminating in Redlaw's physical, mental and spiritual healing:

"O Thou" he said, "Who through the teaching of pure love, has graciously restored me to the [...] memory of Christ upon the cross, and of all the good who perished in His cause, receive my thanks, and bless her!" (*H.M.* p. 470)

The woman's 'natural' power jars with the satanic image of the hissing shadow, suggesting that only a quasi-religious exorcism is able to break the ghost's bargain. Even more significant is that Dickens chose to manipulate an overtly religious vocabulary in his story: no scientific discourse or answer is offered. Thus, the narrative achieves a religious sense of closure, tying in neatly with the Christian Christmas message which foregrounds the notion that Jesus was born for the salvation of mankind.

In a pre-Darwinian world Charles Dickens's *Christmas Books* build upon the author's interest in conflicting fields: science, the supernatural and religion merge to create five very different but equally complex Christmas narratives. As G. K. Chesterton succinctly stated, '[i]n fighting for Christmas he was fighting for the old European festival, Pagan and Christian, for that trinity of eating, [and] drinking'.²⁹⁸ But more importantly, while on the surface his most famous Christmas stories such as *A Christmas Carol*, *The Chimes* and *The Haunted Man* appear to be nothing more than ghost stories published to satisfy public demand and enable Dickens to make money, what lies beneath is something much more substantial: aspects of the sacred trouble his works, suggesting that the ever-sceptical Dickens was more concerned

²⁹⁷ Carse, 'Domestic Transformations' in *Dickens Studies Annual*, p. 169.

²⁹⁸ Cheserton, *Charles Dickens*, p. 161.

with spirituality than he would openly admit. His weakening faith has not disappeared completely at this time. In a society still to be shaken by the evolutionary theories that emerged throughout the 1850s, culminating in Charles Darwin's 1859 publication of *On the Origin of Species*, even this most superficially secular of Victorians seem to be preoccupied with the progress of the soul after death.

I contend that unlike Bulwer Lytton and Crowe, Dickens deliberately uses a supernatural discourse without really subscribing to it, allowing his fascination with religion and quasi-scientific elements to blend with the inexplicable forces of nature. Indeed, it is Dickens's blend of quasi-science and the supernatural which directs my analysis of other Victorian realist authors such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. More specifically, Chapter Two positions the agnostic Eliot as an author whose knowledge about theology, science and esoteric eastern creeds is evident in her fiction but, significantly, is not a substitute for her own lost Christian faith. This is then contrasted to Hardy's work, suggesting that unlike Eliot, Hardy's intimacy with the pagan superstitions of ancient Dorset go some way in replacing his faith which had gradually been eroded by mid-Victorian geological discoveries and theories of evolution. The extended 'context' section of Chapter Two positions Darwin and biblical debates as catalysts for a change in attitude towards the Established Church, paving the way for quasi-religious elements to intrude into even Victorian realist works.

Chapter Two (1860 – 88): Context, Darwin, Texts

I - Context

(i)

Mid-Victorian Britain was a society driven by change: political, social, religious and scientific reform shaped the culture and informed the literature of the period, producing a glorified and powerful nation whose Empire reached across the globe. But I suggest that the period 1860-79 is heavily reliant upon what had gone before, especially with regard to the contentious issue of religion. As Owen Chadwick notes:

Public law and private morals, mental philosophy and social convention – the life of the nation was rooted in an age-long conviction of Christian truth. And mid-Victorian England asked itself the question, now terrible and now liberating, but always tumultuous, is Christian faith true?¹

As society reached towards the answers offered by modern science, orthodox Church of England faith was shaken in an unprecedented manner: the evolutionary debates of the 1850s – culminating in Charles Darwin's research into natural selection – and the religious turmoil which ensued undoubtedly had a huge impact. Moreover, the 1851 Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations was a symbolic landmark of rational and scientific thought, a display which acted as a catalyst for the scientists and thinkers who would come to shape mid- and late-Victorian Britain.² Such a flaunting of technological and scientific strength arguably eroded traditional faith and orthodox Christianity found competition and confrontation in an increasingly secular Victorian world.

¹ Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church* (London: Black, 1966), I, p. 1.

² The Great Exhibition was an extremely influential event and, for further information on the Exhibition see, for example, Nikolaus Pevsner's *High Victorian Design: A Study of the Exhibits of 1851* (London: Architectural Press, 1951), Stella Margetson's *Fifty Years of Victorian London: From the Great Exhibition to the Queen's Death* (London: Macdonald, 1969), John R. Davis's *The Great Exhibition* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), *Victorian Prism: Refractions of the Crystal Palace*, eds. James Buzard, Josephs W. Childers, Eileen Gilleooly (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007) and *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry and of all Nations, 1851: Official Descriptive and Illustrative Catalogue*, ed. Robert Ellis (London: Spicer Brothers, 1851).

Hailed as one of the most important events of Queen Victoria's reign, the Exhibition's Crystal Palace venue dominated the skyline of Hyde Park, London. Even royalty were overwhelmed by the occasion. As David Newsome notes, '[t]his was the "the greatest day in our history", the Queen reported to her uncle in Belgium. "It was the happiest, proudest day in my life"'.³ And, as Jeffrey A. Auerbach observes, '[o]ver 25,000 people mobbed the exhibition building on the first day alone, with thousands more lining the streets to catch a glimpse of the Queen',⁴ while a contemporary critic for the *Illustrated London News* claimed that:

the doubts and fears of many months are at an end – the work is done – the triumph is complete. The great idea of an Exhibition [...] has been realised, and the gates are open of the vast Building, which every branch of industry, and almost every country in the world has contributed to furnish and adorn.⁵

Modernity was integral to the ideology behind the Great Exhibition.⁶ It was an emblem of the strength of the British Empire, acting as a message to the rest of the world that Britain reigned supreme: it was a thoroughly modern display for a modern age. Auerbach reiterates the contemporary conception that 'it symbolized "peace, progress, and prosperity"' and boldly asserted Britain's position [...] as the first industrialized nation [...] as the "workshop of the world".⁷ Twenty-first century historians draw attention to its cultural influence, with critics such as John Gardiner noting that in 1936 '[w]hen the Crystal Palace [...] went up in flames [...] observers mourned the passing of "a link with the Victorian era" and "a monumental relic of the

³ David Newsome, *The Victorian World Picture* (London: John Murray, 1997), p. 50.

⁴ Jeffrey A. Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition of 1851: A Nation on Display* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 1.

⁵ Anon., 'A Guide to the Great Exhibition of Industry', *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 3 May 1851, pp. 358-59 (p. 358).

⁶ The ambitious size of the Exhibition was exceptional, but even more significant, as Louise Purbrick, 'Introduction' in *The Great Exhibition of 1851: New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. Louise Purbrick (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2001), pp. 1-25 notes, the Crystal Palace was 'actually and aesthetically functional. Quickly constructed from industrial materials, prefabricated glass and iron, it was architecturally completely modern' (p. 2).

⁷ Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 1.

Victorian ‘golden age’.”⁸ Its significance as a mark of this ‘golden age’ was the scale and quantity of artefacts which the Exhibition displayed: porcelain, carpets, raw materials, farm machinery, industrial machinery, hardware, glass, gold and silver plate, fine art, sculpture, engines, bookbinding and jewellery filled every inch of the glass corridors. It was, as the *Illustrated London News* claimed, a place where the ‘fruits of scientific progress [were] practically displayed’.⁹ Evidence of rational thinking and artefacts created by science and technology confronted the visiting public at every turn.

One of the most noteworthy features of the Great Exhibition was its perceived ability to unite nations. In a society where anxieties concerning race and ethnicity provided little room for any degree of difference, it seems surprising that the Exhibition organisers chose to display and promote artefacts from across the globe and, more importantly, not just from her colonies. Again, the *Illustrated London News*, which published ‘Exhibition Supplements’ to report extensively on the event, detailed the variety of exhibits:

here we shall find, side by side, in friendly competition, prepared to exchange lessons in civilising arts, nations which once met only as deadly enemies. [...] In addition to our foreign friends, whom courtesy compels us to name first, our colonies and dependencies, many of which, although much talked of, are less known to us than foreign states, make up a goodly array.¹⁰

⁸ John Gardiner, *The Victorians: An Age in Retrospect* (London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2002), p. 41.

⁹ Anon., ‘A Guide’, *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 3 May 1851, p. 358.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 358.

Undoubtedly, however, in reality the colonies took precedence.¹¹ While marvelling at the 'gorgeous collections of jewellery and rich embroidery' which lined the corridors and rooms within the glass building, the mid-Victorians were also fascinated by foreign spirituality.¹² Reports of 'utensils in brass and copper, and pottery [...] especially some which are used by the Hindoos in the worship and service of their idols' were reported in the newspapers.¹³ *The Illustrated London News* claimed that 'the self-feeding peacock lamp [...] used in the Derorah, or temple of the iron-dealers of the Surragee persuasion, by whom it is held sacred, [...] [had been] readily contributed [...] for [the] Exhibition'.¹⁴ There is an implication, therefore, that the prestige of exhibiting at the 1851 Great Exhibition overcame even the religious principles of other races and that the world of technology and science did not preclude religious display as long as this interest centred upon non-Christian faiths.

On the surface, Joseph Paxton's ambitious creation of a glittering Crystal Palace presented 'an ideal industrial world' in a cultural context.¹⁵ The blend of engineering, art and culture had a seemingly hypnotic effect upon the British population and, as Auerbach observes, by the time the exhibition closed in October 1851 'there had been more than six million paid entrances [...] which, allowing for

¹¹ In an article by Anon., 'The East Indian Courts', *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 14 June 1851, the glory of the British Empire was flaunted in displays such as The East Indian Court which praised 'our Oriental brethren' and emphasised the importance of the Crystal Palace to the 'humble and primitive race' (p. 563). For more information on the connection between the Great Exhibition and the topic of Empire see Paul Young's *Globalization and the Great Exhibition: The Victorian New World Order* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009), Paul Young 'Economy, Empire, Extermination: The Christmas Pudding, the Crystal Palace, and the Narrative of Capitalist Progress', *Literature and History*, n.s. 14:1 (Spring 2005), pp. 14-30 and various articles in *Britain, The Empire and the World at the Great Exhibition of 1851*, ed. Jeffrey A. Auerbach and Peter Hoffenberg (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

¹² *ibid.*, p. 563.

¹³ *ibid.*, p. 563.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 563.

¹⁵ Purbrick, 'Introduction' in *The Great Exhibition of 1851*, pp. 1-25 (p. 2).

foreign and repeat visits, represented almost one-fifth of the population'.¹⁶ Indeed, eager visitors flocked from the provinces by train to see this marvel. But it is the statistics that are so significant: by contrast to the staggering attendance at the 1851 Great Exhibition, a census conducted during the same year revealed that a similar number of people¹⁷ were recorded attending the combined Churches of the Roman Catholics, Nonconformists and Protestants on census Sunday.¹⁸ There is a sense, therefore, that a wave of secular and scientific interest, embodied in the first Exhibition, was sweeping the country and that religious adherence was weakening in its wake. As Robin Gilmour explains, 'the Church of England was faced with the crisis of having to adapt an essentially pre-industrial, even medieval parish structure' to an ever-changing modern society.¹⁹ The Church of England, however, was represented inside the Crystal Palace. A critic for the *Illustrated London News* notes that '[a]non, we find a man devoting his life to writing the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments within the compass of a fourpenny bit'²⁰ while another report comments that '[w]e mean to speak of the literature of the Exhibition [...] not of the 170 versions of the Holy Scriptures displayed by the British and Foreign Bible Society'.²¹ Although this statement is not entirely positive, it is apparent that this religious literature was present: in a pre-Darwinian, but increasingly technological world, the Church of England still had a place, albeit marginalised, in the Great Exhibition.

¹⁶ Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 1.

¹⁷ 6,356,222 people were recorded in the census. For further details see Chris Cook in *Britain in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 168.

¹⁸ Cook, *Routledge Companion*, p. 168.

¹⁹ Robin Gilmour, *The Victorian Period: The Intellectual and Cultural Context of English Literature 1830-1890* (Harlow: Longman, 1993), p. 65.

²⁰ Anon., 'General and Miscellaneous Models', *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 5 July 1851, p. 17. This article focuses on the delicate and time-consuming task of printing the Lord's Prayer and Ten Commandments in the small space of a fourpenny coin.

²¹ Anon., 'The Literature of the Exhibition', *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 6 September 1851, p. 288.

Although a religious element found its way into the Great Exhibition, the 1851 Crystal Palace was undisputedly a triumphant display of British industrial and scientific accomplishments. Its successor, the 1854 Sydenham Crystal Palace, which was built on an even larger scale and included an additional three stories to its glass building, demonstrated how science, progress and modern technology are, at this later period, placed alongside a strange yearning for the past.²² Moving further back into history, beyond the Roman mosaics and Greek pottery which had adorned the 1851 Great Exhibition, a deep fascination with ancient civilizations dominated several of the Sydenham Crystal Palace exhibition rooms, offering a new focus for both the 1854 organisers and public:

There were ‘courts,’ each illustrating the art and architecture of a great period in history, the most spectacular of which was the Egyptian court with high pillars, sphinxes, mummies, and enormous statues.²³

In particular, the occult practices of the ancient Egyptian people seemed very popular. Science was important too, the relics of ancient Egypt, which filled the entire north transept of the later Palace, are positioned as being equally important as the engineering and scientific displays which had characterised the 1851 Great Exhibition.²⁴ While technology, religion and recreation co-existed in the 1851 Crystal Palace, only three years later in the 1854 Crystal Palace it seems that public interest

²² The similarities between the 1851 Great Exhibition and its 1854 successor are striking. The second exhibition was opened by Queen Victoria in June 1854 in front of 40,000 spectators and was designed to be a new display of British industry and culture. For more information see Jan Piggott’s *The Palace of the People: The Crystal Palace at Sydenham 1854-1936* (London: Hurst, 2004).

²³ Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 201. Chapter Three of this thesis will detail the mid-to-late Victorian fascination with ancient Egypt in greater detail.

²⁴ As Auerbach in *The Great Exhibition* notes with reference to the changing role of the Sydenham Palace, ‘[d]uring its first thirty years the new Crystal Palace was visited by an average of two million people each year’ noting also the variety of activities and forms of entertainment, which included ‘musical festivals, firework displays, [and] balloon flights’ (p. 202). A changing society presented changing demands: the purpose of this new Exhibition seems to have been to amuse as well as educate. An example of the Exhibition’s newfound desire to amuse rather than solely educate is, as Podmore in *Mediums of the Nineteenth Century*, II, discusses, that in 1868 two spiritualist imitators ‘presented at the Crystal Palace a performance in imitation of that given by the Davenports’ (p. 68). Nevertheless, the forms of popular entertainment, as displayed in the later Exhibition, are still interconnected with science.

was shifting away from orthodox religion, focusing predominantly on technology and the spirituality of ancient cultures. In the face of weakening mid-Victorian religious faith, the British public looked forward to science and backward to history for reassuring knowledge and answers. In the decade that, in the wake of Charles Darwin's work, would later witness the debates surrounding natural selection spark fierce controversy, the stage seems already to have been set: there is less space for the Church of England in both the new 1854 Crystal Palace and in the imagination of the British population.

(ii)

The impression that evolutionary theory emerged after Charles Darwin's publication of *Origin of Species* (1859) is misleading.²⁵ Although Darwin's controversial idea that species evolve over millions of years via natural selection was radical, the notion of evolution in itself was certainly not new. Indeed, a key factor which provided the foundation for evolutionary thought and natural selection was the geological debate which gained impetus throughout the 1820s. Prior to this period, geologists such as the Reverend William Buckland (1784-1856) who, in *Vindiciae Geologicae* (1820), suggested that 'a wide variety of geological phenomenon visible on the English countryside [were] [...] the remains of the great biblical Deluge',²⁶ helped provide a compromise between biblical realists and geologists: religion and science co-existed

²⁵ The full title of Darwin's work is *On the Origin of Species by the Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of the Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. I, however, will be shortening it to *Origin of Species*.

²⁶ Mott T. Greene, 'Genesis and Geology Revisited: The Order of Nature and the Nature of Order in Nineteenth-Century Britain' in *When Science and Christianity Meet*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 139-59 (pp. 139-40). For more information on William Buckland see Charles Coulston Gillispie's *Genesis and Geology: A Study in the Relations of Scientific Thought, Natural Theology and Social Opinion in Great Britain* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951) and Nicholas A. Rupke's *The Great Chain of History: William Buckland and The English School of Geology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983).

in harmony. But this accord did not last long. In November 1821, Buckland received a large collection of bones discovered in a limestone cave in Kirkdale, Yorkshire. After close analysis, the geologist decided that the bones 'were not flood remains [from the biblical Deluge], but the accumulated debris of a long-resident den of hyenas'²⁷ and, as such, 'were [...] not in any sense "flood deposits"'.²⁸ This discovery resulted in a crisis for Buckland in which his own faith in Scriptural authority and, more importantly, his position teaching 'the fledgling science of geology'²⁹ at a theologically-focused Oxford University was put under extreme pressure. The result was a work, *Reliquae Diluvianae (Relics of the Deluge)* which opened with a reaffirmation of the Book of Genesis before manipulating his new discoveries to avoid completely discrediting the Deluge theory: Buckland tried hard to remain 'faithful to both [...] [his] religion and [...] science'.³⁰ But what followed was a prolonged and fraught relation between geologists and biblical realists which, as Gilmour notes, saw geologists battling to 'accommodate the millions of years evidenced by the fossil record without destroying the authority of the Bible as Revealed Truth'.³¹ The relationship between science and religion was undoubtedly strained: a readjusted reading of the Bible was necessary if the Kirkdale discovery was to fit in geologically.

²⁷ Greene, 'Genesis and Geology' in *Science and Christianity*, pp. 139-59 (p. 141).

²⁸ *ibid.*, (p. 143). It had been believed that the earth's surface had been washed clean of species following a series of global cataclysms, ending in Noah's flood. Indeed, this theory nicely tied together the Book of Genesis and geology. Nevertheless, the age of the Kirkdale hyena bones (which were analysed by Buckland) and their position inside the cave suggested that no water had washed away the remains and, as such, contradicted the Deluge theory.

²⁹ Sandra Herbert, 'Between Genesis and Geology: Darwin and Some Contemporaries in the 1820s and 1830s' in *Religion and Society: Essays in Honor of R. K. Webb*, eds R.W. Davies and R. J. Helmstadter (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 68-84 (p. 72).

³⁰ Greene, 'Genesis and Geology' in *Science and Christianity*, pp. 139-59 (p. 159).

³¹ Gilmour, *The Victorian Period*, p. 118. In this work Gilmour goes into great detail about Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-33) which is another key example of the challenge to the catastrophists who upheld the validity of Noah's flood.

Co-existing alongside geological revelations circulating around the dating in biblical Scripture were debates involving natural theology – the notion that both Nature and the human world were designed and controlled by God. But this was not a new concept. Natural theology had gained momentum during the Enlightenment and, more specifically for nineteenth century evolutionary thought, generated widespread attention following the publication of William Paley's *Natural Theology: Or, Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity* (1802), which combined elements of medicine and history with philosophies of natural theology, and William Whewell's Bridgewater Treatise, *On Astronomy and General Physics Considered with Reference to Natural Theology* (1836). Moreover, as George Levine discusses,

[t]here were large variations within natural theology [...] but the most serious scientists within it [...] agreed on maintaining the integrity, coherence, and independence of scientific discourse and on the inevitable confirmation by science of religious faith.³²

Natural theology was an excellent way of reducing any tensions between Christianity and science: the majority of early nineteenth-century natural historians were clergymen who supported the idea that science was ruled by divine intervention. Importantly, Darwin was influenced by natural theology, even quoting Whewell in an epigraph to *The Origin of Species*. But this mark of respect was short-lived. Although, as Levine states, the 'Darwin-Whewell connection suggests that natural theology was closer in many respects to Darwinian argument than it would on the surface seem', the secular concept of natural selection resulted in Whewell barring Darwin's work

³² George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction* (London: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 24. This work explores the complex subject of natural theology as well as the similarities and differences between Paley and Whewell's research. See George Hayward Joyce's *Principles of Natural Theology* (London: Longman, 1934), Michael Anthony Corey's *The Natural History of Creation: Biblical Evolutionism and the Return of Natural Theology* (London: University Press of America, 1995) and Dov Ospovat's *The Development of Darwin's Theory: Natural History, Natural Theology, and Natural Selection* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). It is also interesting to note that William Whewell coined the word 'scientist' as previously they had been known as 'natural philosophers' or 'men of science'.

from the library at Trinity College, Cambridge.³³ Ultimately, the break from natural theology into natural selection was both complex and controversial. Those concerned with the issue of evolution began to turn to empirical science rather than religious faith for solutions.

Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was the culmination of decades of evolutionary research conducted by earlier scientists, geologists and natural historians. One of the most influential pre-Darwinian evolutionists was the French academic Jean-Baptist Lamarck (1744-1829): John Glendening has explored Lamarckian theory, especially the concept that 'species evolve because individuals, in striving to meet their needs in response to changing environments, produce inheritable modifications to relevant features'.³⁴ In works such as *Recherches Sur L'organisation des Corps Vivants* (1802), *Philosophie Zoologique* (1809) and the multi-volumed *Histoire Naturelle des Animaux Sans Vertèbres* (1815-22), Lamarck argued that characteristics were inherited as a result of use or disuse: moles, for example, have developed blindness because they do not use their eyesight underground.³⁵ Furthermore, as Glendening comments, there were similarities between Lamarck's use/disuse model and Darwin's later research into natural selection:

Lamarck's stress on the formative role of environment is similar to Darwin's, who also accepts the idea of acquired characteristics – heritable changes occurring within just one generation because of the use and disuse of parts –

³³ Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists*, p. 27.

³⁴ John Glendening, *The Evolutionary Imagination in Late-Victorian Novels: An Entangled Bank* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 47.

³⁵ For more information on Lamarckian theory see Richard W. Burkhardt's *The Spirit of System: Lamarck and Evolutionary Biology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), L. J. Jordanova's *Lamarck* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) and John Maynard Smith's *The Theory of Evolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Robert Chambers's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) built upon Lamarck's research into inherited features but went a step further, arguing that God does not control social hierarchies and the mutation of characteristics within a species. This complete dismissal of natural theology caused controversy before Darwin's *Origin of Species*. An excellent exploration of the way prior evolutionists influenced the work of Darwin is Loren Eiseley's *Darwin's Century: Evolution and the Men Who Discovered It* (London: Gollancz, 1959).

but only as a secondary factor far less significant than natural selection. Darwin, however, does not embrace the Lamarckian implication that mind [...] drives evolution – that life processes this mental, virtually inherent tendency towards progress.³⁶

Consequently, it was Darwin's theory of natural selection – the concept that genetic variation and reproduction, as opposed to use/disuse, controlled changing characteristics – which caused the most controversy. Lamarckian theory complemented natural theology, arguing that God designed and controlled the use of certain characteristics within a species and, as a result, it sustained good relations between science and the Church. Furthermore, even from within science, natural selection was met with a frosty reception. As Frederick Gregory notes, 'numerous scientists [...] criticised natural selection but accepted evolution, often of a Lamarckian variety'.³⁷ The issue of evolution, therefore, is extremely complex, but geology, natural theology and Lamarckian thinking all paved the way for Darwin's taxonomic approach to evolution and his emphasis on the contentious notion of natural selection.

But Charles Darwin's research into natural selection did not occur in a vacuum. While *The Origin of Species* helped Darwin to achieve long-lasting recognition, the name and work of Alfred Russel Wallace (1823-1919) have fallen into obscurity outside the scientific community. After conducting extensive field-work in the Amazon basin in 1848 before moving onto the Malay Archipelago nearly a decade later, the Welsh-born biologist became fascinated by characteristic variation and what he saw as the transmutation of species. Peter Raby explains that Wallace

³⁶ Glendening, *Evolutionary Imagination*, p. 47.

³⁷ Frederick Gregory, 'The Impact of Darwinian Evolution on Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century' in *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 369-90 (p. 379).

‘became an expert field naturalist, collecting countless species and discovering or identifying many for the first time’ and that he was, in many ways, ‘as much an anthropologist as a field naturalist, recording customs, languages and artefacts, and speculating about the development, and the chances of survival, of particular races’.³⁸

Influenced by the evolutionary ideas of Lamarck and Robert Chambers – whose secular work, *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844) angered natural theologians – Wallace set about analysing his vast array of species samples and countless notebooks. Importantly, it was at this point that Wallace began ‘writing-up’ his research into natural selection. Gilmour emphasises the unsung role which Wallace played:

He [Darwin] was luckiest of all in the character of Alfred Russel Wallace [...] who developed a theory of evolution by natural selection as a result of observations in the Malay archipelago, and had drafted a paper on the subject in 1858 which would, technically, have scooped Darwin if it had been published in the normal course of events. It was only his humility, in sending his paper to Darwin, and his generosity, in allowing Darwin’s friends to present papers by both of them to the Linnean Society, which preserved the originality of *The Origin of Species*: a more ruthless man might have wanted to write it himself.³⁹

In spite of Wallace’s position as the ‘co-inventor of the theory of evolution by natural selection’,⁴⁰ he received relatively little credit. Nevertheless, there does not seem to have been any animosity between the two men with Wallace even dedicating his hugely influential *The Malay Archipelago* (1869) to Darwin. A difference of opinion between these two successful evolutionists did occur, however, after Wallace proved unconvinced by Darwin’s ideas involving humanity in *The Descent of Man* (1871).⁴¹

Malcolm Jay Kottler comments on how Wallace published papers expressing his

³⁸ Peter Raby, *Alfred Russel Wallace: A Life* (London: Pimlico, 2002), p. 3.

³⁹ Gilmour, *The Victorian Period*, p. 125.

⁴⁰ Richard Noakes, ‘Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in Mid-Victorian Britain’ in *The Victorian Supernatural*, eds. Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 23–43 (p. 29).

⁴¹ The full title of Darwin’s work is *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* which applied ideas of sexual selection to his evolutionary theories.

belief that 'natural selection was insufficient to explain the origin of man and that man's origin required the action of higher intelligences guiding the laws of organic development' before suggesting that these ideas 'arose from his experiences at *séances* beginning in July 1865'.⁴² While I will explore the issue of spiritualism and its relation to late-Victorian science in Chapter Three, what is important here is that the work of both Darwin and Wallace was equally influential although, at times, they did not agree: Darwin fell distinctly within the boundaries of pure science whereas Wallace controversially mixed science and spiritualism. Indeed, the issue of evolution by natural selection is much more complex than is first apparent. A number of other factors made Darwin's landmark publication of *Origin of Species* possible.

Regardless of the contributing factors which aided Darwin's research into natural selection, the fact remains that *Origin of Species* (1859) catapulted him into the limelight and engendered a blaze of controversy.⁴³ Even present-day society is

⁴² Malcolm Jay Kottler, 'Alfred Russel Wallace, the *Origin of Man*, and Spiritualism', *Isis*, n.s. 65:227 (June 1974), pp. 145-92 (p. 145). I will be exploring the influence of spiritualism upon the life and works of Alfred Russel Wallace in greater detail in Chapter Three of this thesis.

⁴³ An overwhelming amount of research has been conducted into Charles Darwin's life, works and his impact upon the scientific community. This thesis does not attempt to explore these issues in any detail: I aim to briefly show the context which influenced the religious and scientific view of novelists such as George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. Nevertheless, for more general information on Darwin see *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, eds. Jonathan Hodge and Gregory Radick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); David Roger Oldroyd's *Darwinian Impacts: An Introduction to the Darwinian Revolution* (Milton Keynes: Open University, 1980); Irving Stone, *The Origin: A Biographical Novel of Charles Darwin* (London: Cassell, 1981) and Wilma George's *Darwin* (London: Fontana, 1982). For Darwin's impact upon Christianity see Mary Midgley's *Evolution as a Religion: Strange Hopes and Stranger Fears* (London and New York: Methuen, 1985); *Darwinism and Divinity: Essays on Evolution and Religious Belief*, ed. John Durant (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); Ronald L. Numbers's 'The Creationists' in *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 391-423 and Michael Ruse's *Can a Darwinian be a Christian?: The Relationship Between Science and Religion* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001); *When Science and Christianity Meet*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003); A. D. Gilbert's *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change 1740-1914* (London and New York: Longman, 1976); John Angus Campbell's 'Why Was Darwin Believed? Darwin's Origin and the Problem of Intellectual Revolution', *Configurations*, n.s. 11:2 (Spring 2003), pp. 203-38; Rod Preece's 'Darwinism, Christianity and the Great Vivisection Debate', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, n.s. 64:3 (July 2003), pp. 399-419 and Michael Ruse's *Darwinism and its Discontents* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University

preoccupied with the Darwin-Christianity debate, with the Church of England officially apologising to ‘Charles Darwin for misunderstanding his theory of evolution [...] even though he died 126 years ago’.⁴⁴ Moreover, the man behind Darwinian evolution seems to have been just as multifaceted as his scientific ideas. As A. Hunter Dupree states, ‘[s]cience, religion and Charles Darwin (1809-1882) interacted strongly from the very earlier period of the naturalist’s life’.⁴⁵ Born into a wealthy family, Charles Robert Darwin was baptised and attended a Church of England boarding school in Shrewsbury before studying medicine at the University of Edinburgh in 1825. Discontented with the medical profession, however, the young Darwin neglected his work in favour of a passionate interest in natural history but was sent, nevertheless, to Cambridge University by his annoyed father, to study for a career as a Church of England clergyman. Seemingly intent upon disobeying his father’s wishes, Darwin rejected the Church as a profession, instead accompanying Captain Robert Fitzroy aboard *HMS Beagle* on its 1831 expedition to chart the coastline and rainforests of South America.⁴⁶ For almost five years Darwin was free to explore the area’s geology and document the abundance of its largely unidentified animal and plant life. Significantly, however, Charles Darwin’s rejection of religious studies and his decision to journey in search of new specimens did not necessarily

Press, 2006). For an analysis of Darwin and science see David L. Hull’s *Darwin and his Critics: the Reception of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution by the Scientific Community* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973); *Darwin to Einstein: Primary Sources on Science and Belief*, eds. Noel G. Coley and Vance M. D. Hall (Harlow: Longman, 1980) and *Evolution: Society, Science and the Universe*, ed. A. C. Fabian (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁴⁴ Jonathan Petre, ‘Church Makes “Ludicrous” Apology to Charles Darwin – 126 Years after his Death’, *Mail on Sunday*, 14 September 2008, p. 5.

⁴⁵ A. Hunter Dupree, ‘Christianity and the Scientific Community in the Age of Darwin’ in *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter Between Christianity and Science*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 351-68 (p. 351).

⁴⁶ For a detailed analysis see, for example, *Narrative of the Beagle Voyage, 1831-1836*, ed. Daniel Brass (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2009).

mean that his faith had weakened at this point.⁴⁷ As Dupree explains, while sharing a cabin with the intensely religiously orthodox Fitzroy, 'Charles remained [...] true to both his faith and his calling, and with Fitzroy wrote a defence of British missionaries in Tahiti and New Zealand'.⁴⁸ It was an expedition on the Galapagos Islands which sparked Darwin's interest in the variation of characteristics within species. As early as 1837 he became fascinated by the inconsistency of various characteristics within the Islands' finch species, developing the 'concept of natural selection, by which he meant that in changed conditions of life some organisms will be better adapted than others because of random variation' before arguing that 'they will leave more offspring in the next generation'.⁴⁹ What followed is one of the most documented and scrutinised publications in modern scientific history, radically shaping natural history and Christianity alike.

Encapsulating nearly two decades worth of research, Darwin's 1859 publication of *Origin of Species* was the catalyst for a period of extreme scientific excitement. Again, Dupree observes that 'Darwin had his theory in essentially complete form as early as 1844, but it took him another fifteen years to mature the

⁴⁷ David N. Livingstone's 'Re-placing Darwinism and Christianity' in *When Science and Christianity Meet*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago: Chicago University Press), pp. 183-202 emphasises the complexity of trying to decipher Darwin's own religious inclination, stating that 'to suggest that Christian believers and Darwinian evolutionists have always been at each other's throats is simply a mistake [...] it has not even been possible to come to a final judgment on the religious sentiments of Charles Darwin himself' (p. 183). This excellent article goes on to explain the complexities of the man, commenting that 'there were a number of different Darwins – Darwin the experimenter, Darwin the invalid, Darwin the investor, Darwin the dupe of quack medicine, and perhaps most significant of all a private Darwin and public Darwin' (p. 185). Lindberg explores Darwin's suggested spiritual decline, focusing on the death of his beloved daughter Annie in 1851 but also juxtaposing his varied spiritual state with the fact that he was 'ever sensitive to the religious emotions of the women in his family circle, especially his wife, Emma, whom he did not wish to wound' (p. 187). Additionally, Herbert's 'Between Genesis and Geology' in *Religion and Society*, pp.68-84 addresses the question of Darwin's Church of England faith, as does Turner's 'The Victorian Conflict' in *Interpretations*, IV, pp. 170-97.

⁴⁸ Dupree, 'Scientific Community', p. 351.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 353.

theory to the point where he was willing to publish'.⁵⁰ Although it could be argued that this 'point' was reached simultaneously with Wallace's identical study into natural selection, it nonetheless remains that it was Darwinian evolutionary theory which was immensely popular. Indebted to, yet ultimately breaking away from, the natural theology of philosophers such as William Paley, *Origin of Species* sparked a fraught debate about man's place in nature and, therefore, God's role in evolution. Meanwhile, this new evolutionary school of thought was gathering supporters: no-one was more passionate in his praise of Darwin than Thomas Henry Huxley, also known as 'Darwin's bulldog'. Famously clashing with Bishop Samuel Wilberforce over natural selection during a meeting of the British Association in June 1860, Huxley embodied the more aggressive side of science: David Livingstone points out that during this confrontation 'the lines of "war" were drawn [...] between pro- and anti-Darwinians'.⁵¹ Although the Wilberforce-Huxley disagreement culminated in the Bishop mocking 'the absurdities of the monkey-to-man theory' before unleashing a more personal attack, asking Huxley 'whether he would prefer the ape on his grandfather's or grandmother's side' it is surprising to learn that Darwin does not directly use the ape analogy in *Origin of Species*: subtle allusions were the extent of his linking of apes with mankind.⁵²

⁵⁰ *ibid.*, p. 353.

⁵¹ Livingstone, 'Re-placing Darwinism' in *Science and Christianity*, pp. 183-202 (p. 191). For further information on the Huxley-Wilberforce debate see Adrian J. Desmond, *Huxley: From Devil's Disciple to Evolution's High Priest* (London: Penguin, 1998); Paul White's *Thomas Huxley: Making the 'Man of Science'* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) and Cyril Bibby's *T. H. Huxley: Scientist, Humanist and Educator* (London: Watts, 1959). It is also worth noting that Huxley was famous for first using the term 'agnostic' to describe his own religious views, see A. O. J. Cockshut's *The Unbelievers: English Agnostic thought 1840-1890* (London: Collins, 1964). It is also interesting that Samuel Wilberforce's ideology was closely connected to that of his mentor Richard Owen. Although Owen was possibly one of the most famous Victorian palaeontologists – coining the word 'Dinosauria' for the 'terrible reptile' fossils which he analysed and for founding South Kensington's Natural History Museum in 1884 – he was in firm opposition to natural selection. Again, this emphasises that it was not just theologians who were in opposition to Darwin's concept of natural selection.

⁵² As Gilmour notes in *The Victorian Period*, '[i]f the process of natural selection can be seen operating, inexorably and without interruption, from the profound depths of time, then God becomes

What Darwin did, then, was completely remove God from the scene: Darwin's 'crime' seems to have been what he implied as opposed to what he actually stated.⁵³ Interestingly then, while his theory of natural selection undoubtedly ignited furious ideological clashes there was, as Livingstone again notes, 'a conflict, not so much between science and theology, but between scientists and clergymen'.⁵⁴ In effect, the infrequent yet fierce differences between opponents such as Wilberforce and Huxley have created an inaccurate image of a Darwinian 'war'. Contemporary reviews were often quite positive: for example, a critic for *John Bull* declared that species development by evolution has been 'thrown out before, but it has never been put forward [...] in so definite a shape or philosophical a spirit' before complimenting Darwin's 'ingenuity and scientific knowledge'⁵⁵ while *The Times* stated that Darwin's 'versatility, which is among the rarest of gifts, turned his attention to a most difficult question of zoology [...] and no living naturalist and anatomist has published a better monograph'.⁵⁶ Surprisingly then, pockets of extremism, such as the Wilberforce-Huxley clash excepted, *Origin of Species* appears to have met with an unexpected level of acceptance.

Although the mid-Victorian response is far from straightforward, overall it seems that Christian faith was not immediately shaken. As Frederick Gregory argues, '[t]he *Origin* may ultimately have forced scientists and theologians to reassess the

redundant as an explanation of species change. Previous "evolutionary" theories had allowed for God because they had no convincing mechanism of change: Darwin provided that mankind is hardly mentioned in *The Origin of Species* but the implications were obvious and soon spelled out – by Huxley in *Man's Place in Nature* (1863) [...] and by Darwin himself in *The Descent of Man* (1871) (p. 129).

⁵³ Moreover, perhaps even more unexpected than the lack of apes in *Origin of Species* is that the phrase "survival of the fittest" was coined by Herbert Spencer, not Darwin. For further analysis see Jonathan H. Turner's *Herbert Spencer: A Renewed Appreciation* (London: Sage, 1985).

⁵⁴ Livingstone, 'Re-placing Darwinism' in *Science and Christianity*, pp. 183-202 (p. 191).

⁵⁵ Anon., 'Literary Review', *John Bull*, 24 December 1859, p. 827.

⁵⁶ Anon., 'Darwin On the Origin of Species', *The Times*, Monday 26 December 1859, p. 8.

limits of their respective territories but it did not do so overnight', emphasising that there 'is a tendency among scholars to overestimate the immediate impact that Darwin's book had on the religious community'.⁵⁷ Already accustomed to challenges from both the scientific and religious communities – Robert Chambers's scandalous suggestion of a Godless evolution in *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* (1844), the geological dating of the earth which had discredited the Deluge Theory and angered Biblical realists, the Oxford Movement⁵⁸ and increasingly extreme Evangelical practices – had already challenged the Church of England. The context from which *Origin of Species* emerged had prepared believers for another controversy.⁵⁹ Consequently, the dichotomy between science and religion is not clear cut: to reduce the evolutionary debate, through Lamarck to Darwin, to a story of heroes and villains is misleading. While theologians and evolutionists did not co-exist in complete harmony the open animosity of Huxley and Wilberforce was unusual. *Origin of Species* was an unmistakably influential book, but its initial impact seems retrospectively to have been less controversial.

(iii)

Unexpectedly, it was the publication of *Essays and Reviews* (1860), a collection of articles by various Church of England clergymen, which aroused far more contention

⁵⁷ Gregory, 'Impact of Darwinian Evolution' in *God and Nature*, pp. 369-90 (p. 372).

⁵⁸ On a basic level, the Oxford Movement argued that the Anglican Church was a part of the Catholic Church which was a theory which later developed into Anglo-Catholicism.

⁵⁹ As Gregory in 'Impact of Darwinian Evolution' in *God and Nature*, pp. 369-90 explains, '[i]n the 1860s it was not difficult to hear facile denunciations of Darwin's theory as a menace to religion. But these attacks were generally directed towards Darwinism as yet another scientific theory that had encroached on religious territory; they rarely involved a specific and reasoned objection to evolution by natural selection (p. 375). This point is also discussed by Owen Chadwick in *Victorian Church*, II, who notes that '[m]ore educated Englishmen doubted the truth of the Christian religion in 1885 than thirty years before. And in 1885 many persons, whether they doubted or affirmed, blamed "science" for this change in opinion. Some of them talked as though "science" alone was responsible. And among those who blamed science, some fastened upon the name of Charles Darwin as the symbol, or centre, or intellectual force, of an entire development of the sciences as they came to bear upon the truth of religion' (p. 1).

than *The Origin of Species* (1859) and, as Bernard M. G. Reardon notes, proved to be ‘a turning-point in the history of theological opinion in England’.⁶⁰ Consisting of seven essays on the flaws within Christianity, the volume swiftly incited one of the most sensational controversies of the Victorian period. The contents, as Josef L. Altholz summarises, were radical:

[t]he first by Frederick Temple, was a warmed over sermon urging the free study of the Bible. Rowland Williams wrote a provocative essay on Bunsen, denying the predictive character of Old Testament prophecies. Baden Powell flatly denied the possibility of miracles. H. B. Wilson [...] questioned the eternity of damnation. C. W. Goodwin [...] wrote a critique of the attempted “harmonies” between Genesis and geology. Mark Pattison wrote a [...] historical study of the evidential theologians of the eighteenth century [...] The volume was capped by Benjamin Jowett’s [...] essay [...] in which he urged the Bible to be read ‘like any other book’ and made an impassioned plea for freedom of scholarship.⁶¹

The public outcry which followed the publication of *Essays and Reviews* – which only mentioned *Origin of Species* once – is perhaps predictable. An array of books and pamphlets emerged contesting the issues raised; over 11,000 Anglican clergy signed a petition reaffirming the doctrines which had been challenged by the work while two of its authors, Henry Wilson and Frederick Temple, were tried for heresy in a Church court before being pardoned by the Privy Council.⁶² The book was deemed unacceptable mainly because it was composed by Church of England clergymen. As Chadwick notes, had it been written by laymen ‘it would have fallen dead from the press. Bishop Wilberforce said that the writers could not “with moral honesty

⁶⁰ Bernard M. G. Reardon, *Religious Thought in the Victorian Age: A Survey from Coleridge to Gore* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 321.

⁶¹ Josef L. Altholz, ‘The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy: Anglican Responses to *Essays and Reviews*’ in *Religion in Victorian Britain: Vol IV, Interpretations*, ed. Gerald Parsons (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), pp. 28-40 (p. 29). For more analysis on the essays themselves as well as the aftermath of their publication, see Ieuan Ellis’s *Seven Against Christ: A Study of Essays and Reviews* (Leiden: Brill, 1980); Michaela Giebelhausen’s ‘Holman Hunt, William Dyce and the Image of Christ’ in *The Victorian Supernatural*, eds. Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 173-94 and *Victorian Religious Discourse: New Directions in Criticism*, ed. Jude V. Nixon (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004)

⁶² Gilmour, *The Victorian Period*, p. 97.

maintain their posts as clergymen of the established church”’.⁶³ Lasting nearly four years, the controversy over *Essays and Reviews* raged between Church and state, and ‘[r]eligion and irreligion greatly complicated nineteenth-century politics’.⁶⁴ As Altholz notes, however, at a deeper level, the debate ‘marked [...] the commencement of an era of religious doubt’.⁶⁵ While the critics bickered amongst themselves, a weakening faith in scriptural authority was beginning to infect mid-Victorian society, influencing Church of England ideologies and infiltrating the literature of the period.

The image of mid-Victorian society being thrown into turmoil and plunging into the darkness of religious doubt is potent. Yet, while orthodox Christianity was shaken by the controversial publications of *Origin of Species* and *Essays and Reviews*, initially it was not as bleak as it first seemed. Lance St. John Butler emphasises that ‘doubt can readily be seen not as a mere shadow of faith, a ghost prowling at the feast of believers, but as the very condition of there being faith at all’.⁶⁶ Suggesting that there was a widespread crisis of faith, therefore, is misleading: the relationship between science and the Church of England is much more complex. For example, the ‘prayer-gauge’ controversy which gripped the British population during the early 1870s epitomises what could happen when ‘scientific understanding and religious understanding [...] come into conflict’.⁶⁷ A bitter disagreement involving the truth of Divine miracles between John Tyndall, a physicist and avid Darwin supporter, and the

⁶³ Chadwick, *Victorian Church*, II, p. 78.

⁶⁴ R. W. Davies and R. J. Helmstadter, ‘Introduction’ in *Religion and Society: Essays in Honor of R. K. Webb*, eds. R. W. Davies and R. J. Helmstadter (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 1-6 (p. 1).

⁶⁵ Altholz, ‘The Mind of Victorian Orthodoxy’ in *Vol IV, Interpretations*, pp. 28-40 (p. 29).

⁶⁶ Butler, *Victorian Doubt*, p. 1. The issue of Victorian doubt is extremely complex. For more a more detailed analysis of the topic see Robert Lee Wolff’s *Gains and Losses: Novels of Faith and Doubt in Victorian England* (London: Murray, 1977) and Elizabeth Jay’s *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

⁶⁷ Robert Bruce Mullin, ‘Science, Miracles, and the Prayer-Gauge Debate’ in *When Science and Christianity Meet*, eds. David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 2003), pp. 203-24 (p. 203).

theologian James B. Mozely resulted in a contentious experiment. Intent upon using empirical evidence to test the power of prayer on physical healing – and prove that divine intervention did not affect the social or natural order – Tyndall worked with the surgeon Sir Henry Thompson to compare the healing rates of patients in a prayer-for ward with those in a ward without prayers. Although the ‘prayer gauge’ provoked contempt from Christian communities, it nevertheless did not seem to weaken public faith in prayer: when Prince Edward fell gravely ill in the autumn of 1871, the Crown ‘asked the British clergy to pray for the prince. Amazingly, the prince began to feel better [...] [and] Queen Victorian called for a great service of thanksgiving’.⁶⁸ Even royalty still looked towards religion for help and guidance. I suggest, therefore, that a ‘crisis of faith’ was perhaps limited to individual academics rather than mid-Victorian society as a whole. Gregory reiterates this notion, suggesting that ‘[t]hose scholars who wished to separate science from religion attracted the smallest following [...] Adam and Eve continued to meet the needs of the masses’.⁶⁹ The relationship between the Church of England and science remained extremely complex: while the established Church was challenged from both outside and from within, religious belief and power co-existed alongside new scientific revelations. Despite being forced to reassess religious convictions, there was still ‘extensive revivalism, church-building and [...] new ways of going about the work of Christianity. A real decline in church attendance [...] cannot be established before the 1890s’.⁷⁰ Yet doubt insistently simmers below the surface. Although the mid-Victorian period is often defined by empirical evidence of development and progress – such as advancements in evolutionary thought and controversial religious publications – what lies beneath cannot be ignored.

⁶⁸ Mullin, ‘Prayer-Gauge Debate’ in *Science and Christianity*, pp. 203-24 (p. 211).

⁶⁹ Gregory, ‘Impact of Darwinian Evolution’ in *God and Nature*, pp. 369-90 (p. 387).

⁷⁰ Butler, *Victorian Doubt*, p. 4.

Significantly, in the mid-Victorian period Christianity's previous role – as a tool to explain the world – was being replaced by scientific and technological answers. The Bible could offer neither the evidence nor the answers to satisfy an ever-changing and ever-questioning society. I contend that, faced with the rise of science and the erosion of faith, elements of mid-Victorian society turned their gaze to the past in search of some new way of fulfilling spiritual desire: a new, non-Christian, discourse might be a means of filling the void left by an eroding Christian faith. The 1854 Crystal Palace's Egyptian Court, for example, fascinated mid-Victorian England and drew attention to the power of ancient civilisations. Interest in the unknown grew: science attempted to offer explanations about Christian mysteries such as Biblical dating, species development and the power of prayer and, as Church of England belief came into question, a subtle yet persistent need to look to the past begins to emerge and this can be seen in the fiction produced in this era. I locate the work of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy in the context of the Great Exhibition and Charles Darwin's research, demonstrating how an interest in the unknown is reflected in the writings of even the most traditional of realist authors. Building upon the contemporary preoccupation with juxtaposing science against an apparent supernatural presence, which the Christmas stories of Charles Dickens seem to display, the work produced by Eliot after she embraced agnosticism attempts to balance the tension between science and religion while searching for something to fill the void which a weakening Christian faith inevitably leaves behind. Rather than seeking an alternative to Christianity, however, Eliot deliberately utilises its discourses in her fiction as a literary device to evoke specific meaning.

II - George Eliot

(i)

Born in Warwickshire on 22 November 1819 and christened Mary Anne Evans (1819-80), George Eliot was everything from a popular realist author to literary editor and the subject of a public scandal, and her private life was arguably just as colourful as that of any of her fictional characters. Although she is best known by the pseudonym of George Eliot, as Rosemary Ashton notes she was known under several different names throughout her life: 'Mary Anne Evans (at birth), Mary Ann Evans (from 1837), Marian Evans (from 1851), Marian Evans Lewes (from 1854), and Mary Ann Cross (1880)'.⁷¹ This plurality of identity gives an insight into the multifaceted aspects of Eliot's personality and works. Nevertheless, her early life was settled and comfortable. Before being sent to boarding school in 1828, she enjoyed a rural childhood with her sister Christiana or 'Chrissy' (1814-59) and older brother Isaac (1816-90), and had a close relationship with her father, Robert Evans (1773-1849).⁷² The most influential figure in her early life, however, was from outside the family. Maria Lewis, an Evangelical teacher at Eliot's Nuneaton school in 1832, became a long-lasting friend who, as Haight comments, displayed a fervent 'evangelicalism [which] rested on diligent study of the Scriptures'.⁷³ Although, suggesting that 'religion in the Evans family [...] was of the high-and-dry variety, suspicious of all

⁷¹ Rosemary Ashton, 'Evans, Marian [George Eliot] (1819–1880)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6794> [accessed 25 March 2009]. For the sake of clarity and consistency I am going to refer to her as George Eliot throughout this thesis.

⁷² These formative years – prior to any family estrangement – are reflected in many of her fictional works so, as Gordon S. Haight in *George Eliot: A Biography* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) observes, '[t]here is good reason for reading autobiography' (p. 5) in novels such as *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) and *Adam Bede* (1859) as well as what Marghanita Laski in *George Eliot and Her World* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) terms as the 'frankly autobiographical' (p. 14) sonnet 'Brother and Sister' (1874).

⁷³ Haight, *George Eliot*, pp. 8-9.

extremes',⁷⁴ Haight also emphasises the impact of Lewis upon her impressionable young student, noting how:

following her example, Mary Anne read the Bible over and over again [...]. The vigorous prose of George Eliot is based on a thorough familiarity with the King James version. To those days can also be traced the habit of introspection, which led to the psychological analysis for which her novels are notable, and a profound concern with religion.⁷⁵

This new religious exposure certainly had a profound affect upon the quiet and conscientious Eliot: she even helped to establish and lead student prayer meetings, displaying a religious zeal which dominated her adolescence. But her new-found faith ran deeper than simple prayer meetings. Again, Haight notes that:

conversion, the conviction that one was utterly sinful and could be saved from hell only by accepting the atonement of Christ, was the conventional beginning of the religious life. [...] [I]t struck Mary Anne suddenly and hard. Though she never cared much about dress and had no beauty to be proud of, she now began to neglect her personal appearance in order to show the state of her soul.⁷⁶

Christianity was integral to the identity of the young George Eliot. This adolescent brush with Evangelicalism was intense but ultimately short-lived. What followed this almost militant piety was an unexpected crisis of faith which would affect her future public and private life.

1841 proved to be a period of change for the then 22 year-old George Eliot. After moving with her father to Coventry, she began a friendship with the wealthy philanthropist and religious freethinker Charles Bray (1811-84) and his wife Cara. Significantly, a year prior to meeting the Brays she had already studied works by various German biblical historians as well as a religious text by Cara's brother, Charles Hennell, which resulted in Eliot tentatively beginning to question her

⁷⁴ Gordon S. Haight, 'From Faith to Doubt' in *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 3-4 (p. 3).

⁷⁵ Haight, *George Eliot*, p. 9.

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p. 19.

religious faith.⁷⁷ Eliot's simmering discontent with the Scriptures erupted into open antagonism on 2 January 1842 when she stubbornly refused to attend Church, sparking a 'holy war' with her father. Family, friends and local clergymen tried to reason with Eliot but her thorough theological research meant that she was conversant with the books which they enlisted to try and reverse her scepticism: George Eliot's rejection of Christianity was, from this moment, fixed.⁷⁸ Forced to move out of the family home by her furious father, she desperately attempted to heal the rift via written correspondence. But only one letter to Robert Evans, dated 28 February 1842, survives:

I regard these writings [biblical Scriptures] as histories [...] and while I admire and cherish much of what I believe to have been the moral teaching of Jesus himself, I consider the system of doctrines built upon the facts of his life and drawn as to its materials from Jewish notions to be most dishonourable to God and most pernicious in its influence on individual and social happiness. [...] I could not without vile hypocrisy and a miserable truckling to the smile of the world for the sake of my supposed interests, profess to join in worship which I wholly disapprove.⁷⁹

Eliot chose to read the Bible as a historical work, not as a spiritual document. Although the father-daughter breach did, in time, heal, Eliot's interest in theology remained academic rather than spiritual.⁸⁰ In 1844 she began the translation of David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu, Kritisch Bearbeitet* (1837) which was published as *The Life of Jesus. Critically Examined* (1846), followed shortly after by a translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's treatise *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (1841)

⁷⁷ Hennell's *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity* (1838) challenged the supernatural elements of the Gospels and as Laski in *George Eliot* explains, it 'concluded that Christianity could not be accepted as stemming from Divine Revelation, but [...] was "the purest form yet existing of natural religion"' (p. 23).

⁷⁸ For a more detailed analysis of George Eliot's movement away from Evangelicalism see Mark Knight and Emma Mason's chapter 'Evangelicalism: Brontë to Eliot' in *Religion and Literature*, pp. 120-51.

⁷⁹ George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1954), I, pp. 128-29.

⁸⁰ David Jasper's 'Literary Readings of the Bible' in *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation*, ed. John Barton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 21-34 draws attention to the way in which many authors who have rejected the 'theological pretensions [of the Bible] [...] nevertheless continue to enjoy it as a treasure-house of English prose' (p. 21).

which, as Ashton notes, is a German work aimed at 'demystifying scripture'.⁸¹ A further influential examination of Christianity was George Eliot's translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christenthums* (1841) which she published as *The Essence of Christianity* (1854). In spite of George Eliot's new-found agnosticism a philosophical interest in theological debates, coupled with her analysis of the Bible as a history, remained: an interest in, if not an adherence to, Christianity is absolutely central, rather than peripheral, to both her life and fiction.

George Eliot's unconventionality was not restricted to religion. Her relationships with men also defied the restraints deemed appropriate by Victorian society, engulfing the author in scandal. In January 1851 Eliot moved to London in pursuit of a career in journalism, lodging with John Chapman, a radical publisher with whom she shared an intimacy that may have been sexual as well as working with him in the editing of the *Westminster Review*.⁸² Someone who had an even greater impact upon Eliot's personal and professional life, however, was Chapman's close friend and colleague George Henry Lewes (1817-78). Although Eliot had previously fallen in love with another of Chapman's acquaintances, the philosopher and social theorist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), her relationship with Lewes proved to be longer lasting. Rivalling George Eliot in his unconventionality, Lewes had, in 1841, agreed to an open marriage with Agnes Jarvis, a marriage which saw her give birth to her husband's children in addition to others fathered by Lewes's friend Thornton Hunt.

⁸¹ Ashton, 'Evans, Marian', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6794> [accessed 25 March 2009]. Another excellent analysis of Strauss's work can be found in *Religion and Literature: A Reader*, eds. Robert Detweiler and David Jasper (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).

⁸² Ashton, 'Evans, Marian', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6794> [accessed 25 March 2009]. Importantly, even after her relationship with the married Chapman cooled, Eliot maintained her influence upon his periodical. As Ashton documents, 'she, from a mixture of diffidence, modesty, and fear of playing a public role, was happy to remain behind the scenes, doing the work and letting Chapman put his name to it'.

To complicate matters further, Lewes agreed to register as the father of all of Agnes's children – regardless of whether they were his or not – and so made it impossible for the couple to divorce.⁸³ Apparently, undisturbed by Lewes's extraordinary domestic set-up, Eliot took the decision in 1853 to live openly with him and, in effect, sealed an estrangement with her family which would last until her death.⁸⁴ What is important in this relationship, however, is that Lewes helped foster Eliot's profound intellect.⁸⁵

Indeed, Ashton discusses how Lewes's writings covered:

topics as diverse as drama, fiction, history, philosophy, and science [...] His articles appeared in almost every Victorian journal, including the *Edinburgh Review*, the *Foreign Quarterly Review*, the *British and Foreign Review*, *Fraser's Magazine*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, *The Leader*, the *Fortnightly Review*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the *Cornhill Magazine*.⁸⁶

Theirs was an unsanctified 'marriage' of intellectual equals. After travelling across the continent together, Eliot tentatively began writing fiction while Lewes, who also acted as her literary agent, took trips to West Wales to collect materials for his forthcoming *Sea-Side Studies* (1858). The married men in George Eliot's life cast a shadow over her respectability but gave her much in return: Chapman, Spencer and Lewes opened up a new intellectual world, encouraging and providing opportunities for her to pursue interests in everything from pseudo-science and philosophy to writing fiction.

⁸³ Ashton, 'Evans, Marian', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6794> [accessed 25 March 2009] notes that when 'he subsequently met and fell in love with Marian Evans, he could not sue for divorce, as under the terms of the law he had condoned his wife's adultery by registering the births of her children by Hunt in his own name'. For further information on George Henry Lewes see David William's *Mr. George Eliot: A Biography of George Henry Lewes* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983) and Rosemary Ashton's *G. H. Lewes: An Unconventional Victorian* (London: Pimlico, 2000).

⁸⁴ As Oliver Lovesey in 'The Other Woman in *Daniel Deronda*', *Studies in the Novel*, n.s. 30:4 (Winter 1998), pp. 505-520 discusses, Eliot 'accepted the role of fallen woman' (p. 506) and changed her name to Marian Evans Lewes although, as Haight notes in *George Eliot*, 'the Leweses practised some form of birth control, and intended to have no children' out of wedlock (p. 205).

⁸⁵ Lewes also tried to shield an overly sensitive Eliot from public criticism and gossip. For further discussion see Tom Sperlinger's "'The Sensitive Author": George Eliot', *Cambridge Quarterly*, n.s. 36:3 (2007), pp. 250-72.

⁸⁶ Rosemary Ashton, 'Lewes, George Henry (1817-1878)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford University Press, 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16562> [accessed 30 March 2009].

George Eliot's engagement with academic debates allowed her, as Sally Shuttleworth notes, to bring 'a breadth of knowledge of contemporary social and scientific theory unmatched by any of her peers' to her work.⁸⁷ Even prior to meeting Lewes, Eliot had an interest in the pseudo-science of phrenology, writing to Maria Lewis on 18 February 1842 that 'I am pronounced to possess a large organ of [...] conscientiousness'⁸⁸ before allowing George Combe – an Edinburgh phrenologist who also mentored Catherine Crowe – to shave off her hair and have a 'phrenological cast made of her head' in 1844.⁸⁹ This interest in pseudo-science inevitably blossomed, shaping her 1859 short story *The Lifted Veil* which, as Martin Willis notes, interrogated double-consciousness and clairvoyance as well as 'the key cultural implications of mesmeric phenomena'.⁹⁰ In contrast to Catherine Crowe, however, Eliot's curiosity about Victorian pseudo-science did not include spiritualism: as Sarah A. Willburn notes, Eliot instead read Charles Bray's *Delusion* (1873), a work 'that set about disproving spiritualism' completely.⁹¹ Never one to shy away from active investigation, she accompanied Lewes to an 1874 *séance* arranged by the evolutionist and avid spiritualist supporter, Alfred Russel Wallace, who was endeavouring to

⁸⁷ Sally Shuttleworth, *George Eliot and Nineteenth Century Science: The Make-Believe of a Beginning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. ix.

⁸⁸ George Eliot, *Selections from George Eliot's Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 20.

⁸⁹ Laski, *George Eliot*, p. 27.

⁹⁰ Martin Willis, 'George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil* and the Cultural Politics of Clairvoyance' in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, ed. Martin Willis and Catherine Wynne (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 145-61 (p. 145). Although this short story was originally published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, it has since been published as a novella and, as a result, is often referenced as *The Lifted Veil*. For clarity and consistency, I am going to refer to the novella as *The Lifted Veil* in this thesis. Further discussion on the pseudo-scientific aspects of *The Lifted Veil* see, for example, B. M. Gray's 'Pseudoscience and George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, n.s. 36 (1982), pp. 402-23; Jill Galvan's 'The Narrator as Medium in George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*', *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 48:2 (Winter 2006), pp. 240-50; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Women Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Imagination* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) and Thomas Albrecht's 'Sympathy and Telepathy: The Problem of Ethics in George Eliot's *The Lifted Veil*', *Journal of English Literary History*, n.s. 73:2 (Summer 2006), pp. 437-463.

⁹¹ Sarah A. Willburn, *Possessed Victorians: Extra Spheres in Nineteenth-Century Mystical Writings* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), p. 25.

convert members of the scientific community – including ‘Darwin’s Bulldog’, T. H. Huxley, who also attended the same *séance* – to his cause. But his efforts proved to be in vain. William Irvine notes how ‘Lewes had been troublesome, making jokes and refusing to sit quietly in the dark’⁹² while Eliot was equally unconvinced. She had already written to Harriet Beecher Stowe on 4 March 1872 that:

I desire on all subjects to keep an open mind, but hitherto the various phenomena reported or attested in connection with ideas of spirit-intercourse [...] have come before me here in the painful form of the lowest charlatanerie. Take Mr. Hume [Home] as an example of what I mean. I would not choose to enter a room where he held a *séance*. He is an object of moral disgust to me [...] [he] is an impostor.⁹³

By contrast to Edward Bulwer Lytton’s fascination with the spiritualist Daniel Dunglas Home, Eliot shared Charles Dickens’s negativity towards Home and the spiritualist movement in general.⁹⁴ Her ideas were more in keeping with Wallace’s

⁹² William Irvine, *Apes, Angels and Victorians: A Joint Biography of Darwin and Huxley* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1995), p. 243. Furthermore, as Wilma George in *Biologist Philosopher: A Study of the Life and Writings of Alfred Russel Wallace* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1964) discusses, Wallace’s ‘friends were astonished that he should be taking spiritualism so seriously. Lewes [...] convinced himself of trickery [...] Darwin was grieved [...] [and] Huxley was tolerant (p. 242). Indeed, as early as 1853, George Henry Lewes had written an article which discredited spiritualist mediums. In ‘The Rappers Exposed’, *Leader*, 12 March 1853, pp. 261–63 he aimed to ‘investigate the matter thoroughly’ (p. 161) before pronouncing the rappings to be ‘a flagrant, a transparent trick’ (p. 262). His analysis drew upon Dickens’s investigations into the subject, concluding that the account of Mrs Hayden ‘in *Household Words* [...] is accurate’ (p. 262). Moreover, Amanda Claybaugh’s ‘Towards a New Transatlanticism: Dickens and the United States’, *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 48:3 (Spring 2006), pp. 439–60 emphasises how ‘during the 1850s [...] she [Eliot] notes [...] that American literature is characterized by “certain defects of taste” and “a sort of vague spiritualism and grandiloquence”’ (p. 441). Her negativity towards spiritualism, therefore, coincides with Lewes own conclusion that spiritualism is trickery.

⁹³ Eliot, *Selections*, p. 401.

⁹⁴ George Eliot’s relationship with Edward Bulwer Lytton was often strained. Although Haight’s *Biography* notes that during her school years ‘Mary Anne read Bulwer Lytton’s *Devereux*’ (p. 15) this early admiration soon turned sour. Haight’s *Selections* notes a letter of 6 December 1861 in which she ridicules his fascination with the supernatural, stating how he ‘is caught by the spirit of the marvellous, and a little while ago, at Dickens’s house, was telling of a French woman who could raise the dead’ (p. 270). This tension between Bulwer Lytton and Eliot crept into their professional relationship. Leslie Mitchell in *Bulwer Lytton* emphasises how Lytton’s ‘fear of rivals could lead to astonishing judgements, perhaps the most remarkable of which was his dismissal of George Eliot. He thought that *Adam Bede* was her only readable production, and even that was “third rate”’ (p. 122) while ‘George Eliot [...] found *A Strange Story* “unwholesome”’ (p. 149). Also, Edwin M. Eigner in ‘The Changed ending of *Great Expectations*’ notes how in ‘referring to *The Mill on the Floss*, he makes [...] the [...] point. “In studying plot and incident – this very remarkable writer does not outweigh what is Agreeable and Disagreeable”’ (p. 107). In a letter to her publisher, John Blackwood on 23 February 1860 – published in *George Eliot’s Life as Related in her Letters and Journals*, ed J. W. Cross (London and Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1886) – notes how Bulwer Lytton ‘thinks the two defects of ‘Adam Bede’ are

evolutionary research than with his spiritual investigations. More specifically, Charles Darwin's concept of natural selection and species development deeply influenced Eliot's work, colouring her major novels and journalism in a variety of ways.⁹⁵ Indeed, Darwin was a frequent visitor at the Lewes-Eliot household; on 22 March 1868 Eliot wrote to Sara Hennell, explaining that Mr. Morley had asked 'Mr. Lewes to write on Darwin for the *Fortnightly Review*, so, having something that he wanted to say on Darwin and Darwinism, he is finishing two long articles on the subject'.⁹⁶ The diversity of mid-Victorian scientific and pseudo-scientific debate had a profound influence upon both Lewes and Eliot.

Religious debate persistently haunted George Eliot. Her scientific understanding, insistence upon rationality and dismissal of Biblical miracles were firmly rooted but an underlying interest in Christian theology remained. Alessandra Grego emphasises how Eliot 'was able to include into the realist novel stories from

the dialect and Adam's marriage with Dinah; but, of course, I would have my teeth dawn rather than give up either' (pp. 303-04).

⁹⁵ The most thorough critical exploration of George Eliot's use of evolutionary concepts is Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983) which positions *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* as responses to Darwinian ideas of species sexual selection, extinction and the natural order. Sally Shuttleworth's 'The Language of Science and Psychology in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*' in *Victorian Science and Victorian Values: Literary Perceptions*, ed. James Paradis and Thomas Postlewait (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1985), pp. 269-98 examines the notion of organic growth in society, focusing specifically on *Daniel Deronda*. Tess Cosslett in *The Scientific Movement and Victorian Literature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982) argues that the works of George Eliot are viewed as scientific because of their gradualist, evolutionary presentation of social progress while George Levine's *Darwin and the Novelists* also examines the impact of what he terms as 'Darwin's revolution' (p. 1). Other useful works are Rebecca D. DeNeve's 'Metaphors Drawn from Natural History in Selected Novels of George Eliot and Charles Dickens' (Doctoral Thesis, Florida State University, 1994) and Diana Postlethwaite's 'George Eliot and Science' in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 98-118. A further useful exploration of George Eliot and science is Alice Jenkins's 'George Eliot, Geometry and Gender' in *Literature and Science*, ed. Sharon Ruston (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 72-90 which focuses on the influence of mathematics on George Eliot's fiction and Peter Allan Dale's *In Pursuit of a Scientific Culture: Science, Art, and Society in the Victorian Age* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) which explores not only Eliot and Lewes's interest in scientific investigation, but also explores Eliot's interest in Positivism.

⁹⁶ Eliot, *Selections*, p. 342. An analysis of the scientific context – influenced by T. H. Huxley, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer and G. H. Lewes – upon Eliot's writings is Michael Davis's *George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

the Bible alongside stories drawn from classical mythology and the study of the Bible as a collection of myths'.⁹⁷ Nowhere is this mixed curiosity more apparent than in her connections with the newly emerging positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte (1798-1857)⁹⁸ which, as Suzy Anger notes, was 'a significant influence on her thoughts'.⁹⁹ After losing her Evangelical faith in the early 1840s, Eliot had already explored the work of philosophers and Biblical critics such as Ludwig Feuerbach, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill. Her next step was to explore Comte's theory of humanity's intellectual progress which would, in time, take on what Anger terms a 'form of religion, requiring bizarre daily rituals'¹⁰⁰ and, as Lance St. Butler notes was, 'imbued with religious elements'.¹⁰¹ This awareness was encouraged by G. H. Lewes who also displayed an interest in positivism, publishing his *Biographical History of Philosophy* (1845-46) – which culminated in an analysis of Comte's positivism – in addition to Comte's *Philosophy of the Sciences* (1853). But, as with most aspects of George Eliot's life, things are not clear cut: it seems that neither Eliot nor Lewes qualified as true positivists, 'Lewes because he disliked all religions [...] and George Eliot because, though attracted to much in Comte's Religion of Humanity [...] also

⁹⁷ Alessandra Grego, 'George Eliot's Use of Scriptural Typology: Incarnation of Ideas' in *Myths of Europe*, ed. Richard Littlejohns and Sara Soncini (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 123-31 (p. 123).

⁹⁸ On a basic level, Auguste Comte's philosophy stated that human knowledge and society passes through three 'stages': the theological, metaphysical and positivist (the former he also subdivides into three ascending stages: fetishism, polytheism, monotheism). The philosophy of positivism argued that strict scientific investigation would replace metaphysics in the history of thought. Furthermore, he viewed sociology as an influential new science as well as coining the word 'altruism' to mean a moral obligation. Between 1851 and 1854, Comte published four volumes of the *Système de Politique Positive*, arguing for a new 'religion of humanity': his work was translated by Harriet Martineau and published as *The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte* in 1855. For more general information on Comte see *The Essential Comte: Selected from 'Cours de Philosophie Positive'*, ed. Stanislav Andreski and trans. Margaret Clarke (London: Croom, 1974) and Edward Caird's *Social Philosophy and Religion of Comte* (Glasgow: Maclehose, 1893).

⁹⁹ Suzy Anger, 'George Eliot and Philosophy' in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 76-97 (p. 77). Other studies are Terence R. Wright's *Religion of Humanity: The Impact of Comtean Positivism on Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and M. Gatens's 'The Art and Philosophy of George Eliot', *Philosophy and Literature*, n.s. 33:1 (2009), pp. 73-90.

¹⁰⁰ Anger, 'Eliot and Philosophy', p. 78.

¹⁰¹ Butler, *Victorian Doubt*, p. 59.

ignored much'.¹⁰² Anger reiterates this point, suggesting that Eliot's 'moral views are, in fact, hard to pin down within the categories of any standard philosophical view'.¹⁰³

It seems that Eliot resisted committing fully to this fledgling religion; in an age of intensifying Christian doubt, Eliot's interest in obscure creeds remained rooted in the secular, positioning her largely as an agnostic. Free from ecclesiastical trappings, Eliot was able to explore the expression of human faith. Although she retained an interest in theological discussion, she was not a religious believer.

(ii)

The Mill on the Floss (1860) is one of George Eliot's most famous and popular works of fiction. It has an overtly autobiographical gloss and parallels are often drawn between Tom and Maggie Tulliver's strained relationship and that of Eliot and her brother Isaac.¹⁰⁴ The story centres upon Maggie Tulliver, the 'wild, passionate and dark-haired' protagonist whose untamed personality conflicts with the 'firm and moralistic' personality of her brother, Tom.¹⁰⁵ After a close, but often fraught, childhood together at Dorlcote Mill on the river Floss, Tom leaves to go to school

¹⁰² Martha S. Vogeler, 'George Eliot and the Positivists', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, n.s. 35:3 (December 1980), pp. 406-31 (p. 409). For further information on the Comtean references in George Eliot's work see Postlethwaite's 'George Eliot and Science'; Peter Melville Logan's 'George Eliot and the Fetish of Realism', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, n.s. 35:2 (Autumn 2002), pp. 27-52; Suzanne Graver's *George Eliot and Community: A Study in Social Theory and Fictional Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Evan Horowitz 'George Eliot: The Conservative', *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 49:1 (Autumn 2006), pp. 7-32; Rylance's *Victorian Psychology*; Shuttleworth's 'The Language of Psychology'.

¹⁰³ Anger, 'Eliot and Philosophy', pp. 80-81.

¹⁰⁴ Like Maggie Tulliver, Eliot was intellectually superior to Isaac; Eliot's second novel has an intrinsically personal depth. A. S. Byatt's 'Introduction' in *The Mill on the Floss* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. xi-xliii foregrounds the issue, stating that the 'book has that recognizable, peculiarly autobiographical quality which is present in *David Copperfield* (1849-50), with which it was sometimes compared' before, importantly, noting that after '*The Mill* there were no further novels "out of her life"' (p. xi). *The Mill on the Floss* is peculiarly unique to Eliot as an intense connection between the author and the narrative frames the text. The boundaries between George Eliot and Maggie Tulliver are overtly, and arguably self-consciously, fluid. In a letter to her publisher, John Blackwood, dated 31 March 1859, Eliot describes the tale as 'a sort of companion picture of provincial life' (Eliot, *Selections*, p. 207) before later telling him that 'my stories grow in me like plants, and this [*The Mill*] is only in leaf-bud. I have faith that the flower will grow'. See Eliot, *Selections*, p. 221.

¹⁰⁵ Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction*, p. 434.

while Maggie grows romantically attached to Philip Wakem, the son of her father's enemy. But Maggie's world is shattered when her father clashes with Mr. Wakem before having a seizure and, on his death-bed, makes Tom swear vengeance against the whole Wakem family. Torn apart by her love for Tom and for Philip, Maggie leaves the Mill before eventually returning to live with her cousin, Lucy Deane. Unfortunately, Maggie then falls in love with Lucy's fiancé, Stephen Guest, and on a river boat trip is swept away with him, sparking scandalous rumours of an elopement. On her return home Maggie is alone and disgraced: the tangled story ends when Tom and Maggie both drown in a great flood on the Floss. In contrast to the classic Dickensian novel, therefore, *The Mill on the Floss* fails to provide a happy ending. Although Algernon Charles Swinburne famously tore apart the novel, claiming that '[t]he hideous transformation by which Maggie is debased [...] would probably and deservedly have been resented as a brutal and vulgar outrage on the part of a male novelist',¹⁰⁶ praise nonetheless flowed from many of Eliot's contemporary readers. While, as Byatt observes, 'Lewes kept from her [...] any reviews, or comments on them, to which she was almost morbidly sensitive'¹⁰⁷ there was no need for such tight censorship with *The Mill*. The *Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* hailed the advent of a new, fresh and powerful writer';¹⁰⁸ the reviewer for *John Bull* predicted that the 'reading world [...] [would be set] on the *qui vive*'¹⁰⁹ and *The Times* triumphantly declared that "'George Eliot" is as great as ever',¹¹⁰ concluding that:

[w]e must point out, however, that the object which the author has set herself of painting in all its nakedness, hideousness, and littleness the life of respectable brutishness which so many persons lead, illuminated by not one

¹⁰⁶ Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'The Hideous Transformation', quoted in *George Eliot: The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Carroll (London: Routledge, 1971), p. 165.

¹⁰⁷ Byatt, 'Introduction' in *The Mill*, p. xxxv.

¹⁰⁸ Anon., 'The Book of the Month', *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, Tuesday 1 May 1860, p. 45.

¹⁰⁹ Anon., 'Literary Review', *John Bull*, Saturday 14 April 1860, p. 235.

¹¹⁰ Anon., 'The Mill on the Floss', *The Times*, Saturday 19 May 1860, p. 10.

ray of spiritual influence, by no suspicion of a higher life, of another world, of a surrounding divinity,— lifts the present work out of the category of ordinary novels. The author is attempting not merely to amuse us as a novelist, but, as a preacher, to make us think and feel. [...] In the highest sense we might call this a religious novel, only that description is liable to be misunderstood, and especially as religion is chiefly “conspicuous by its absence”.”¹¹¹

The novel’s lack of spiritual material did not go unnoticed. It is, as the reviewer notes, precisely the absence of religion which thrusts it into the spotlight: spiritual issues instead lie beneath the narrative.

However, in *The Mill on the Floss* religion is indisputably overshadowed by science and pseudo-scientific references invade the narrative. For example, Tom Tulliver is described as having ‘a physiognomy in which it seems impossible to discern anything but the generic character of boyhood’ which is ‘as different as possible from poor Maggie’s phiz’¹¹² while the ‘lights and lines of [...] [Mr. Wakem’s] human countenance’ are read like ‘symbols’ needing a ‘key’ (p. 260). The text manipulates the vocabulary of phrenology – a pseudo-scientific practice which George Eliot had openly advocated – as the man’s facial features are scrutinised and used to decode his personality. But not only pseudo-sciences infiltrate *The Mill on the Floss*: an evolutionary discourse also shapes the novel. As George Eliot’s own life story shows, both she and Lewes displayed a keen interest in Darwinian theories of natural selection which, in turn, is apparent in her fiction. Tess Cosslett observes that ‘George Eliot describes the unconscious development of her characters by metaphors drawn from geological and biological processes’¹¹³ while Diana Postlethwaite also

¹¹¹ Anon., ‘The Mill’, *The Times*, Sat 19 May 1860, p. 10.

¹¹² George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 36. All further references to *The Mill on the Floss* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis. It is also relevant to note that physiognomy is the study of the human body as a means to indicate character. For more information see Lucy Hartley’s *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹¹³ Cosslett, ‘*The Scientific Movement*’, p. 77.

notes that '[i]t is no coincidence that [...] [Eliot] so frequently uses metaphors drawn from science to describe mental states'.¹¹⁴ Published in the direct aftermath of *Origin of Species* (1859), *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) was not composed in a vacuum: in a letter dated 5 December 1859, Eliot wrote to Mme. Eugène Bodichon that: '[w]e have been reading Darwin's Book "Origin of Species" just now: it makes an epoch, as an expression of his thorough adhesion [...] to the Doctrine of Development'.¹¹⁵ Rick Rylance observes how George Eliot 'made [...] [a] post-evolutionary point with quiet insistence in her systematic deployment of animal imagery to describe mental habits of the human communities in *The Mill on the Floss*'.¹¹⁶ The issue of Eliot's evolutionary narrative framework has been extensively discussed by critics such as Gillian Beer and George Levine. But, despite this much-discussed evolutionary framework, my interest lies in the irrational witchcraft allusions which covertly subvert the scientific and pseudo-scientific aspects and unsettle the text. I contend that Eliot deliberately utilises non-Christian discourses in her fiction in order to evoke specific meaning; her witch imagery is used as a literary device to allow for the expression of unconventional female desire.

Maggie Tulliver is frequently upheld as a paradigm of unconventional femininity. A. S. Byatt notes that '[n]atural selection or some other genetic procedure, endowed Maggie with the quick abstract intelligence [...] which Tom lacked'.¹¹⁷ Yet, this female intelligence is not simply driven by rationality and science: the narrative repeatedly connects this complex heroine with powerful supernatural imagery. In contrast to Vanessa D. Dickerson's statement that George Eliot had published all of

¹¹⁴ Postlethwaite, 'George Eliot and Science', p. 104.

¹¹⁵ George Eliot, *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1954), III, p. 227.

¹¹⁶ Rylance, *Victorian Psychology*, p. 29.

¹¹⁷ Byatt, 'Introduction' in *The Mill*, p. xxiii.

her 'ventures into the supernatural by 1859, the year of Darwin's *Origin of Species*',¹¹⁸ I argue that the paranormal insidiously creeps into Eliot's post-1859 fiction in a less obvious way than in works such as *The Lifted Veil*. Something more sinister than science overshadows *The Mill on the Floss*: a discourse of witchcraft haunts the text.¹¹⁹ For example, as a child Maggie declares her favourite book to be "'The History of the Devil" by Daniel Defoe', subverting the Victorian notion of childhood innocence and purity, while later in her adolescence the narrative blames Maggie's wild decision to run away with the gypsies on 'the small demons who had taken possession' (p. 105). Although this reference to demonic possession could simply be a tool to convey a childhood tantrum, *The Mill on the Floss* relentlessly creates parallels between Maggie's unconventional, free-spirited femininity and witchcraft. For example, when Tom returns home during the school holidays and resumes his privileged position, Maggie's annoyance is once more represented in supernatural terms: it was 'not difficult for her [Maggie] to become a demon' (p. 299),

¹¹⁸ Dickerson, *Ghosts in the Noontide*, p. 132.

¹¹⁹ The historical background of witchcraft is explored by Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Brian P. Levack and Roy Porter in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Athlone Press, 1999). This work emphasises the difference between the destructive anti-social use of black magic with the innocent charms and love potions of white magic. It further asserts that witchcraft is the practice of magic or sorcery by those outside the religious mainstream of a society. Interestingly, the existence of witchcraft in some form can be traced to pre-Christian or pagan society. Although in the early Christian centuries the Church was relatively tolerant of magical practices, this soon changed with the belief that witches appealed to the Devil to work magic for the purpose of denying, repudiating and scorning the Christian God. Such ideas culminated in the 'witch-craze' that possessed Europe from 1450 to around 1700 and produced the *Malleus Maleficarum*, a dossier of ways to prevent bewitchment. During this period, thousands of suspected witches were executed on the basis of 'confessions' that were forcibly obtained through torture. It also important to emphasise that even during the nineteenth century many people – especially in rural communities – still retained a popular belief in witchcraft. Russell Hope Robbins in *The Encyclopaedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* (London: Peter Nevill, 1959), p. 473, gives numerous examples of nineteenth-century English bewitchment. Even during the 1920s an elderly woman living in Sussex was reported to be seen out accompanied by five imps in the form of a rat, a cat, a toad, a ferret and a mouse. Perhaps the most famous example of fairy abduction was that of the Irishwoman Bridget Cleary in 1895 in Ballyvadlea near Clonmel. This event is discussed by Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra in *Witchcraft and Magic*, p. 143, who explains that the woman's husband, father and a well-known herb doctor attempted to drive out the fairy changeling within her and bring back the real Bridget. Believing that the fairy would leave the house through the chimney, they held Bridget over a turf fire and covered her in lamp oil. She died from her burns and her husband and cousin buried her body in a nearby swamp. See Angela Bourke's *The Burning of Bridget Cleary: A True Story* (London: Pimlico, 1999). The topic of witchcraft is extremely dense and, as such, this thesis is only going to focus upon English witchcraft. Moreover, the topic will receive a more in-depth analysis in the Thomas Hardy section of Chapter Two.

suggesting that feminine desire for independence is constructed as evil. In order to convey the non-conformist female child, therefore, Eliot turns to the discourse of witchcraft as Maggie's frustrated childhood intelligence has no established mode of expression: there is no feminist discourse for Eliot to use so Maggie's struggles are articulated in other ways.

Maggie Tulliver's early interest in Defoe's *History of the Devil* is again apparent as the narrative emphasises her unconventional treatment of her secret childhood doll:

The attic was Maggie's favourite retreat on a wet day [...] here she kept a Fetish which she punished for all her misfortunes. This was a trunk of a large wooden doll [...] now defaced by a long career of vicarious suffering. Three nails driven into the head commemorated as many crises in Maggie's nine years of earthly struggle (p. 31).

In stark contrast to Charles Dickens's depiction of the properly feminine Esther Summerson's love for her 'dear old [...] faithful Dolly',¹²⁰ Maggie mutilates and distorts the toy, subverting the traditional function of a doll, using this childhood comforter in a disturbingly paranormal way. For the twentieth-century psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, a fetish is an object or part of the body where sexual desire is arrested.¹²¹ As such, Maggie's witch-like representation as a child has a sexualised nuance, implying that her childhood frustrations, often connected to her undesirable female intelligence – which she displaces upon the fetish doll – will develop into sexual frustration as Maggie matures.¹²² With regard to *The Mill on the Floss*,

¹²⁰ Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 28. Additionally, Garrett Stewart in 'The New Mortality of *Bleak House*', *ELH*, n.s. 45 (1979), pp. 443-87 notes that '[t]he doll quite literally objectifies Esther's need for affection' (p. 446).

¹²¹ The issue of Freud and the fetish is complex and will not be explored in any detail in this thesis. For further information see, for example, Sigmund Freud, *On Sexuality: Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works*, ed. Angela Richards (London: Penguin, 1991) and Sigmund Freud, *Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995).

¹²² Gail Finney, 'Demythologizing the Femme Fatale: Wilde's *Salomé*' in *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*, ed. Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 182-

moreover, the narrative describes how the mutilated fetish doll was a 'luxury of vengeance [...] suggested to her by the picture of Jael destroying Sisera in the old Bible' (p. 31). Eliot manipulates biblical stories in Maggie's justification of her strange, suggestively sexual, 'Fetish' (p. 31). Although George Eliot's interest in Comte's positivism – and the notion that human knowledge progresses through an early 'fetishism' stage which, if found in contemporary culture, would be identified as regressive – arguably informs the narrative, I am interested in the magical, as opposed to the philosophical, connotations of the fetish doll. As Thierry Goater explains, 'the Portuguese origin of the word "fetish" [...] derives from *fetiço* which means "artificial" and by extension "spell", "enchantment"', before noting that Charles de Brosses, the man thought to have coined the word 'fetishism', defined it as a 'form of religion' whereby objects acquire 'divine virtue'.¹²³ With this in mind, therefore, magical power and dark spiritual forces shape Eliot's portrayal of Maggie. Whatever the cause of Maggie's frustrations – whether she is intellectually or later sexually frustrated – scientific explanations fall short of providing answers: *The Mill on the Floss* reverts to the vocabulary of witchcraft as a means of articulating unexpressible female emotions.

As if to make a connection between unconventional childhood femininity and magical spirituality, the text works on two levels: superficially it is all just harmless

88 observes that '[f]or Freud the fetish stems from the mother's lack of a penis, but the structure of the fetish is ambivalent as since the child both recognizes [...] [their] lack and disavows his recognition by creating a fetish and thus relieving his castration anxiety; his simultaneous acknowledgement and disavowal lead to both affection and hostility towards the fetish' (p. 183). Although I am going to limit my analysis to a Comtean reading of fetishism in *The Mill on the Floss*, as opposed to a psychoanalytical or Freudian reading, for more information on a psychoanalytical reading of Eliot see, for example, Dorothea Barrett's *Vocation and Desire: George Eliot's Heroines* (London: Routledge, 1989) and Lucie Armitt's *George Eliot: Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, Middlemarch* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2001).

¹²³ Thierry Goater, 'The Letter Killeth': The Text as Fetish in *Jude the Obscure*, *Hardy Review*, n.s. 10:2 (Autumn 2008), pp. 129-37 (p. 133). Wendy Steiner in *The Scandal of Pleasure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), p. 81 also explores the origins of the word 'fetish'.

nonsense. But there is always a sinister undertone. Even though it is represented as just a naughty, childish whim, the inclusion of the mutilation of a fetish doll cannot be completely innocent or accidental: the intertwining of religion and witchcraft is deliberate.¹²⁴ For example, when Maggie becomes overexcited at the thought of Tom's return from school she is described as 'whirling around like a Pythoness' (p. 32) – a direct allusion to biblical supernaturalism. A. S. Byatt emphasises the significance of this reference, stating that a Pythoness is a 'woman possessed by a god or a spirit [...] A term applied to [...] the Witch of Endor'.¹²⁵ There is a suggestion that demonic possession, or at least a fear of it, underlies the representation of Maggie, negating childhood innocence. More specifically, the narrator links magical allusions with the Bible: the text is infused with interlinking references to Christianity and witchcraft. The Church has historically been concerned with witchcraft: as Gillian Bennett notes, 'ties between orthodox doctrine and the subterranean theology of supernatural belief have been closer than is always recognized',¹²⁶ while Keith Thomas explains how 'the distinction between magic and religion was [...] an impossibly fine one'.¹²⁷ Only a Catholic priest was allowed to perform exorcisms and a thorough understanding of black magic was necessary for a cleric to counteract bewitchment.¹²⁸ With regard to the Victorian period, moreover, William Howitt – a friend of Charles Dickens and contributor to *All the Year Round* – wrote extensively

¹²⁴ Keith Thomas in *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1997) details how '[h]oly relics became wonder-working fetishes' (p. 26), emphasising the connection between Christianity and the supernatural power of the fetish.

¹²⁵ A. S. Byatt, 'Explanatory Notes' in *The Mill on the Floss* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 561-79 (p. 562). The Witch of Endor claimed to be able to summon the ghost of the deceased prophet, Samuel, in The Old Testament's First Book of Samuel (see 'Old Testament', *English Bible*, pp. 255-56). This Book details how King Saul of Israel asked the witch to call upon the ghost to ask for help in his war against the Philistine army. However, the ghost of Samuel would only predict Saul's downfall which occurred the next day on the battlefield.

¹²⁶ Gillian Bennett, *Traditions of Belief: Women, Folklore and the Supernatural Today* (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 150. Henry Spicer's 1853 study into the supernatural, *Facts and Fantasies*, explores biblical occurrences of necromancy (p. 34).

¹²⁷ Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, p. 30.

¹²⁸ Marijke Giswilt-Hofstra, *Witchcraft and Magic*, p. 140.

on the Church's interest in demonic possession and exorcism, stating that 'the seventy-second canon of the Anglican Church' forbids all its 'ministers [...] without licence of the bishop of the diocese under his hand and seal, to attempt [...] to cast out any devil or devils'.¹²⁹ Connections between Christian religion and a darker, older, non-Christian faith emerge to unsettle *The Mill on the Floss*, giving a deeper meaning to Maggie's representation as a naughty little girl with a magical fetish doll which develops later into something equally 'other' as the adult Maggie Tulliver turns to medieval mysticism, superstition and magic. New, unsatisfied, implicitly sexual desires force the unconventional young woman towards a more extreme mix of witchcraft and religion.

If the presentation of Maggie Tulliver as a witch-like child starts off as harmless fun – she is a little girl who disfigures her doll in a tantrum – as the narrative proceeds it becomes more serious. As Maggie reaches maturity, her childish forays into witchcraft as a means of empowerment and gaining control over her life are overtaken by a new type of extremism unnervingly linked to Christianity. Her disastrous relationships with Philip Wakem and Stephen Guest result in this unconventional woman 'seek[ing] guidance' (p. 316) elsewhere, turning to religion and, more specifically, the work of the medieval mystic Thomas à Kempis (c.1380-1471)¹³⁰, as a source of consolation and of control over both her body and soul:

Maggie [...] pushed her heavy hair back, as if to see a sudden vision more clearly. Here, then, was [...] insight, and strength, and conquest, to be won by means entirely within her own soul, where a supreme teacher was waiting to be heard. [...] Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it. She knew nothing of doctrines and

¹²⁹ Howitt, *History of the Supernatural*, p. 192.

¹³⁰ Thomas à Kempis was a Catholic monk and mystic who devoted his life to copying, interpreting and teaching the Bible. His most famous work is *The Imitation of Christ* which was one of the most popular medieval books on the devotion of Christ. For more information see Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. by E. M. Blaiklock (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1979).

systems – of mysticism or quietism: but this voice out of the far-off middle ages, was the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience, and came to Maggie as an unquestioned message. (pp. 302-03)

Medieval mysticism – as opposed to a fetish doll, dark spirituality or witchcraft – suffuses the close of the narrative.¹³¹ The language self-consciously reflects devotional vocabulary while Maggie's 'vision'¹³² implicitly positions this mid-Victorian woman alongside medieval mystics such as Margery Kempe (c. 1373-1438).¹³³ At a more subtle level Maggie's 'panting for happiness' and implicitly erotic 'ecstasy' (p. 302) again suggest that her previous intellectual frustration – which articulated itself in the discourse of witchcraft – has now combined with sexual

¹³¹ Although I am aware that the term 'mysticism' can be applied to Christianity, Judaism and Paganism when describing religious visions and fervent devotion, I am only going to explore the allusions to Christian mysticism in *The Mill on the Floss*. Moreover, mysticism differs from spirituality as it is a term used to describe more extreme religious devotion. For more general information on the influence of Pagan, Jewish and Christian mysticism upon George Eliot see Saleel Nurbhai and K. M. Newton's *George Eliot, Judaism and the Novels: Jewish Myth and Mysticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 117.

¹³² The use of the word 'vision' has significant biblical connotations. Similarly to the mesmeric trances and visions which Catherine Crowe repeatedly links to religious visions in *The Night Side of Nature* (1846), William Howitt in *History of the Supernatural* draws attention to the frequency of divine visitations in the Bible: '[i]t is in the fifteenth chapter of Genesis that we first find God speaking to Abraham in a vision, and the reality of communication in vision is made most positive by the fact, that in this vision God promised him an heir by miraculous means, and afterwards literally fulfilled the promise' (p. 128). With regard to the connection between mesmeric trances and medieval mysticism see Alison Winter's *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), p. 38.

¹³³ Margery Kempe was a Norfolk wife and mother who, after a bout of self-confessed madness, believed that Jesus came to her in a vision, asking her to forsake the material world and dedicate her life to God. Kempe was an extremely unconventional medieval woman who left her husband so that she could undertake a more holy life. She produced a very complex autobiographical book, documenting all of her various visions, prayers and conversations with God. In her work she describes her position as a mystic and her role in carrying out the will of God on earth. She records how God enters into conversation with her during her meditations and how she experiences visions of being present at the birth of both Mary and Jesus. See, Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. by B. A. Windeatt (London: Penguin, 1994). For further information on medieval mystics see Roger Ellis, 'Holy Fictions: Another Approach to the Middle English Mystics' in *Approaching Medieval English Anchorite and Mystical Texts*, ed. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden, Roger Ellis (Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 157-74; Santha Bhattacharji's *God is an Earthquake: The Spirituality of Margery Kempe* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997) and Santha Bhattacharji's 'Medieval Contemplation and Mystical Experience' in *Approaching Medieval English Anchorite and Mystical Texts*, ed. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden, Roger Ellis (Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 51-59. However, the most interesting work, with regard to traces of medieval mysticism in nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction is Ann M. Hutchison's 'Approaching Medieval Women Mystics in the Twenty-First Century' in *Approaching Medieval English Anchorite and Mystical Texts*, ed. Dee Dyas, Valerie Edden, Roger Ellis (Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 2005), pp. 175-83. Another article which connects a medieval mystical text to the nineteenth century is Gillian Rudd's 'From Popular Science to Contemplation: the Clouds of *The Cloud of Unknowing*' in *Literature and Science*, ed. Sharon Ruston (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), pp. 13-34

frustration which equally cannot be spoken: there is a sense that Maggie's sexual energy is redirected into religious belief in order to express her unspoken – unspeakable – desires. Again, I suggest that Eliot manipulates medieval religious hysteria into a kind of metaphor for the unspeakable issue of sexual desire/repression. As Ioan Williams notes, in mystical writings Maggie 'discovers a new world of experience [...] without trial or [...] suffering'.¹³⁴ But there is a twist. Christian mystics such as Margery Kempe and Thomas à Kempis wrote extensively about their visions of dead saints and messages sent from God but also referred to their ability to levitate: even in this religious mysticism, there is an element of the supernatural. Interestingly, moreover, there still seems to be a, albeit strained, parallel between Maggie's previous witch-like portrayal and this new adherence to medieval mysticism: as Grace M. Jantzen observes, '[w]itches were perceived to be the mirror image of true mystics; as true mystics experienced God, so these women experienced communion with the devil'.¹³⁵ The boundaries between medieval mysticism – a controversial type of Christianity which was often viewed by the medieval church as heretical – and witchcraft are blurred. Nevertheless, the narrator is careful to present Maggie as a devotee of mystical writings rather than a mystic herself. What is described as her 'martyrdom' (p. 305) and avid reading of 'her three books, the Bible, Thomas-à-Kempis, and the "Christian Year"' (p. 306) whilst incarcerated inside the Tulliver family home are examples of what Barry Qualls terms 'the sacred in her [Eliot's] realist project'.¹³⁶ A spiritual dimension connected to witchcraft and its use

¹³⁴ Ioan Williams, *The Realist Novel in England: A Study in Development* (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1974), p. 180.

¹³⁵ Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 269.

¹³⁶ Barry Qualls, 'George Eliot and Religion' in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. George Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 119-37 (p. 124). In this article Qualls foregrounds 'George Eliot's lifelong need for the Bible's language and typologies' (p. 124) in her fiction. Gillian Beer's *George Eliot* (Brighton: Harvester, 1986) also explores Maggie's martyrdom and its effect upon the narrative conclusion. The issue of biblical allusions is further explored by

to metaphorically release the frustration of unconventional femininity is at odds with the largely realist structure of *The Mill on the Floss*.

Despite its unhappy ending, *The Mill on the Floss* is a realist text: as Catherine Belsey observes, '[c]lassic realism is [...] [a] narrative which leads to closure': order must be restored for a text to conform to the realist genre.¹³⁷ *The Mill on the Floss* has an unconventional restoration of order, as the flood waters which drown Maggie and Tom negate the narrative chaos and allow for a sense of closure.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, Eliot's text pushes the boundaries of realist fiction, not only by killing its heroine but also in its unconventional treatment of religion. Maggie's brush with medieval mysticism is an example of the way in which Eliot self-consciously uses spirituality metaphorically in her representation of unconventional femininity. The narrative links Maggie's Christian dogma repeatedly but obliquely with extreme mysticism allowing

Reverend Brian Davies in 'George Eliot and Christianity', *Downside Review*, n.s. 100 (1982), pp. 47-61, Felicia Bonaparte in *The Triptych and the Cross: The Central Myths of George Eliot's Poetic Imagination* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1979) and Joan M. Chard in 'Sacred and Secular' who explains how even after Eliot's 'renunciation of Evangelical Christianity, Eliot continued to revere the Bible' (p. 14). Mark Knight and Thomas Woodman in 'The Word in the Word: An Introduction' in *Biblical Religion and the Novel, 1700-2000*, eds. Mark Knight and Thomas Woodman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 1-12 also focus on authors such as Eliot and Dickens who 'are not centrally notable for their religious content [...] [but] can be seen to explore the specifics of theology at certain points (p. 3). With regard to *The Mill on the Floss*, furthermore, Suzy Anger in 'George Eliot and Philosophy' points out that Maggie's internal conflict, after her perceived element with Stephen, is related in 'the section entitled "The Great Temptation"' (p. 93) while A. O. J. Cockshut notes how Maggie dies as a result of a great flood which arguably is drawing upon biblical symbols of Noah (p. 57). Moreover, her manner of death is important, not simply because of its connection with the biblical deluge, but also because drowning was historically used to discern witchcraft. Although Maggie's death illustrates her innocence – a witch was believed to survive the water test while an innocent woman would drown – the important point is this further connection between Maggie Tulliver and the tradition of witchcraft. For more information on the water-torture technique see David Pickering, *Dictionary of Witchcraft* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 446-47.

¹³⁷ Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 70. For more information on George Eliot as a realist author see U. C. Knoepfelmacher's *George Eliot's Early Novels: The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968); Ian Watt's 'Realism and the Novel Form' in *The Realist Novel*, ed. Dennis Walder (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 214-223; Dennis Walder's 'The Genre Approach' in *The Realist Novel*, ed. Dennis Walder (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 3-30 and David Skilton's *Anthony Trollope and his Contemporaries: A Study in the Theory and Conventions of Mid-Victorian Fiction* (London: Longman, 1972).

¹³⁸ The conventional restoration of order in a realist text is achieved by a marriage. Charles Dickens, for example, often used this technique in novels such as *David Copperfield*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*.

for a metamorphosis from non-Christian witch-like child into a kind of anchoress.¹³⁹

This is most obvious in the images of imprisonment and self-inflicted suffering:

“Do keep it [a novel by Walter Scott], Maggie,” said Philip, entreatingly “it will give you pleasure.” “No thank you,” said Maggie, putting it aside with her hand and walking on. “It would make me in love with this world again, as I used to be; it would make me long to see and know many things – it would make me long for a full life.” “But you will not always be shut up in your present lot: why should you starve your mind in that way? [...] Poetry and art and knowledge are sacred and pure.” “But not for me – not for me,” said Maggie [...] “Because I should want too much, I must wait – this life won’t last long.” (p. 318)

The more Maggie is physically and psychologically shut away from society inside the home – and implicitly away from the men who have engendered her sexual desire and consequent frustrations – the closer she becomes to God: similarly to the medieval anchoress, then, she is resigned to a form of death in life in preparation for Heaven.

What Philip calls her ‘self-torture’ (p. 342) and ‘committing [...] [a] long suicide’ (p. 342) reiterates her self-imposed religious incarceration. In Maggie’s eyes, Philip

¹³⁹ As Susannah Mary Chewning in ‘Gladly Alone, Gladly Silent: Isolation and Exile in the Anchorite Mystical Experience’ in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs: Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 103-15 states, ‘[i]t is, however, important initially to differentiate between the mystic and the anchorite, terms which can sometimes be confused’ (p.102). The anchoress is discussed in Grace M. Jantzen’s *Julian of Norwich: Mystic and Theologian* (London: SPCK, 1987). In this work, Jantzen draws attention to the medieval practice of male (anchorite) and female (anchoress) solitary enclosure within an anchorhold attached to the side of the church: their life was to be set apart for prayer and communication with God. The idea of the anchoress’s ‘death to the world’ was symbolised in the requiem Mass being sung before the anchoress was bolted inside her anchorhold which was then to be considered her grave. The two most influential anchoresses, Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, were both mystics who recorded their holy visions and strange levitations. For more information on both these women see *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert-McAvoy (London: D. S. Brewer, 2008) and *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body in the Discourses of Enclosure*, ed. Liz Herbert-McAvoy (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008). Interestingly, Liz Herbert-McAvoy’s article, ‘Gender, Rhetoric and Space in the *Speculum Inclusorum*, Letter to a Bury Recluse and the Strange Case of Christina Carpenter’ in *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold*, pp. 111-26 looks at Christina Carpenter who fled her anchorhold only to be forced to return, branded with Christ’s marks and guarded to prevent any further escape. More specifically, Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker’s ‘Foreword’ in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs*, pp. 1-5 draws comparisons between the medieval anchoress and the Victorian ideal of femininity in what she terms as ‘the so called “Victorian” idea which saw the “good” housewife as one who longs for her husband or father in the seclusion of her home’ (p. 1). Moreover, Mari Hughes-Edwards and Liz Herbert McAvoy’s ‘Introduction: Intersections of Time and Space in Gender and Enclosure’ in *Anchorites, Wombs and Tombs*, pp.6-26 also focuses on nineteenth-century fiction, stating that ‘Victor Hugo [...] memorably reconstructs a medieval Parisian woman as a recluse, presenting the enclosed woman as also the madwoman, the frenzied mystic who conflates in one body a whole conglomeration of transcultural and transhistorical fears of the dark, unfathomable alien “other”’ (p. 6). These articles are important as they connect the medieval anchoress with the Victorian female, something which I argue is apparent in Eliot’s presentation of Maggie Tulliver.

becomes 'a tempter' (p. 342), offering her books and other worldly pleasures to lure her away from the sacred haven she has created. Significantly, the issue here seems to be about female sexuality and empowerment: just as Maggie's mutilation of her fetish doll was an attempt to control those around her and articulate her desire for intellectual freedom, so too is this unorthodox Christian extremism used to gain control over her future (spiritual fate) and her unspoken sexual desires.¹⁴⁰ What Eliot seems to be doing, therefore, is undercutting her scientific rhetoric with an older, albeit unconventional, version of orthodox religion: she is, at least *The Mill on the Floss* suggests, not yet ready completely to relinquish Christianity.¹⁴¹ Eliot's fiction is continually looking backwards; the past, whether a previous Christian faith or an ancient adherence to non-Christian magical beliefs, provides a discourse in which Eliot can discuss unconventional topics within her realist text without having to adhere to these beliefs herself. But *The Mill on the Floss* resists extreme controversy, staying firmly within the boundaries of medieval Christianity. It is not until the publication of Eliot's final novel, *Daniel Deronda* (1876), when Darwin's *Origin of Species* and *Essays and Reviews* have had time to infiltrate the public consciousness and further weakened Christian faith that Eliot can more openly insert unorthodox realism into her text. But religion still plays an important role. Rather than turning to an English past, in *Daniel Deronda* Judaism and its history dominate the narrative.

¹⁴⁰ June Skye Szirotny's 'Maggie Tulliver's Sad Sacrifice: Confusing but not Confused', *Studies in the Novel*, n.s. 28:2 (Summer 1999), pp. 178-200 also explores Maggie's quest for spiritual perfection, focusing predominantly on the contemporary response to the novel while Kathleen Blake's 'Between Economies in *The Mill on the Floss*: Loans Verses Gifts, or, Auditing Mr. Tulliver's Accounts', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, n.s. 33 (2005), pp. 219-37 looks at Maggie's spiritual reversion using a Capitalist gift-exchange framework.

¹⁴¹ It is also interesting that other religious Victorian authors, such as Elizabeth Barrett-Browning (1806-61) and Emily Dickinson (1830-86), chose to live introverted and reclusive lives similar to that depicted by George Eliot in her presentation of Maggie Tulliver. Alison Winter in *Mesmerized* states that Barrett enjoyed nursing her nerves in 'the still air of her cloistered bedroom' while the American poet, Emily Dickinson, insisted on dressing in white, keeping to her bedroom and sustaining any friendships through written correspondence. In 1852 she wrote a poem beginning, 'Some keep the Sabbath going to Church -/ I keep it, staying at Home, see Emily Dickinson, *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little Brown, 1960), p. 153.

(iii)

After securing her position as a popular mid-Victorian realist author, George Eliot perhaps felt free to experiment with the genre. *Daniel Deronda*'s unconventional blend of Jewish mysticism, Zionist pilgrimage and esoteric occult practices marks, as Deirdre David notes, Eliot's 'departure from [...] the realist novel'.¹⁴² Serialised in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* from February to September 1876, Eliot's final novel is complex and unpredictable. The plot is broken into two intertwining narrative threads: the first follows the beautiful but spoilt heroine, Gwendolen Harleth, and her disastrous marriage to the cruel Henleigh Grandcourt. Even though Gwendolen is forewarned of Grandcourt's sadistic nature by his 'discarded mistress' Lydia Glasher, the lure of money and financial security proves too strong and Gwendolen enters into what proves to be a marriage of torment.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, following a prolonged period of mental anguish, the heroine is finally set free when her husband drowns in a boating accident. The second narrative strand focuses on Daniel Deronda, a 'young aristocrat of mysterious origins'.¹⁴⁴ After meeting the then unmarried Gwendolen losing money in a casino, he later returns her pawned item of jewellery and their paths then separate for a time. While Gwendolen subsequently focuses on her marriage, Deronda's life takes a new turn after he saves a young Jewess, Mariah Lapidoth, from drowning herself rather than submit to her father's plan to sell her into an arranged marriage. In his attempt to track down Mariah's family, he meets what John Sutherland calls the 'saintly, zealous'¹⁴⁵ Jew, Ezra Mordecai Cohen, who preternaturally recognises Deronda's connection with Judaism, accurately observing

¹⁴² Deirdre David, *Fictions of Resolution in Three Victorian Novels: 'North and South', 'Our Mutual Friend' and 'Daniel Deronda'* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1981), p. 184. Alessandra Grego in 'Scriptural Typology', p. 127 also notes that 'the mystical elements [of *Daniel Deronda*] dominate over the realistic ones'.

¹⁴³ Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction*, p. 169.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 169.

that his origins are Jewish: a sense of mind over matter pervades the narrative's depiction of the spiritual Mordecai, giving an almost supernatural aspect to this devoutly religious character.¹⁴⁶ Similarly to Eliot's unconventional depiction of Jewish mysticism, the romantic aspects of *Daniel Deronda* are just as unpredictable. In contrast to romantic conventions, the newly widowed Gwendolen and Deronda do not find happiness together. Instead, Deronda marries Mariah, who accompanies him on a voyage of spiritual discovery to the East. Eliot's plot was risky and, as Terence Cave points out, she was 'hazarding her unparalleled reputation in order to stretch her readers' minds in a direction they could not have foreseen'.¹⁴⁷ Yet, her gamble was, on the whole, successful: the majority of contemporary reviewers gave her work the highest praise.¹⁴⁸ After reading the first 'tantalising fragment' of the novel, *The Times* declared Gwendolen to be 'brilliant [...] [and] captivating',¹⁴⁹ before printing details of a public lecture on Eliot's treatment of Judaism which is described as having been 'frequently interrupted by applause'.¹⁵⁰ The *Graphic*, however, gave the completed work a mixed reception, stating that '[w]e should not wish George Eliot to repeat the experiment she has made [...] but [...] even if the book is a mistake [...] we cannot

¹⁴⁶ The choice of name is further significant, arguably drawing upon Mordecai from the Old Testament's Book of Esther who helped save the Jews in the provinces of Kind Ashasuerus from slaughter.

¹⁴⁷ Terence Cave, 'Introduction' in *Daniel Deronda* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. ix-xxxv (p. xiii).

¹⁴⁸ For further information on the historical representation and treatment of Judaism and Jewish people in Victorian England see, for example, Miriam Elizabeth Burstein's "'Not the Superiority of Belief, but Superiority of True Devotion": Grace Aguilar's Histories of the Spirit' in *Silent Voices: Forgotten Novels by Victorian Women Writers*, ed. Brends Ayres (London: Praeger, 2003), pp. 1-26; George Bronstein's 'The Colours of Zion: Black, Jewish and Irish Nationalisms at the Turn of the Century', *Modernism/Modernity*, n.s. 12:3, pp. 369-85 which explores the origin of the term 'anti semitic'; Bryan Cheyette's *Constructions of 'The Jew' in English Literature and Society: Racial Representations, 1875-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) which focuses on the work of Matthew Arnold, Anthony Trollope and George Eliot; Daniel Akiva Novak's *Realism, Photography and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) which analyses the fictional depictions of the Jewish body as a literary photograph; George Collard's *Moses, the Victorian Jew* (Oxford: Kensal, 1990) which looks generally at the biography of the Jewish race in Victorian Britain. For a more recent examination of the topic, however, see Gertrude Himmelfarb's *The Book of Daniel: the Jewish Odyssey of George Eliot* (New York and London: Encounter, 2009).

¹⁴⁹ Anon., 'Daniel Deronda', *The Times*, Monday 21 January 1876, p. 6. For a more in-depth analysis of the contemporary response to *Daniel Deronda*, see Cave's 'Introduction', pp. ix-xxxv and Debra Gettelman's 'Reading Ahead in George Eliot', *Novel*, n.s. 39:1 (2005), pp. 25-49.

¹⁵⁰ Anon., 'Daniel Deronda', *The Times*, Monday 11 December 1876, p. 6.

call it other than a splendid one'.¹⁵¹ Similarly, the *Atlantic Monthly* expressed its conflicting views in the form of a fictional conversation between two women: one perceived the text as 'the weakest of her [Eliot's] books [...] inferior to *Middlemarch*'¹⁵² while the other stated that it 'becomes part of one's life; one lives in it or alongside of it'.¹⁵³ Whatever the critical reaction, *Daniel Deronda* was undoubtedly a huge achievement. Interestingly, moreover, the critics seem preoccupied with the striking differences between Eliot's final novel and its predecessors. Although its Jewish content places the narrative in stark contrast to *The Mill on the Floss*, subtle allusions to science and, more openly, pseudo-science, create parallels between the two works, suggesting that Eliot is loathe to move away from this area even in her most unconventional of narratives.

As suggested earlier, pseudo-scientific investigation, evolutionary theory and Darwinian thought had a profound affect upon Eliot, Lewes and their social circle, and this is evident in her work. Yet, by the time she serialised *Daniel Deronda* (1876) – seventeen years after the publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and five years after *The Descent of Man* (1871) – there seems to be a redirection in her enthusiasm: the evolutionary aspects so evident in *The Mill* are, in *Daniel Deronda*, subdued, but, importantly, still present. For example, the unattractive Juliet Fenn, a minor character, is described in evolutionary terms: the 'natural selection of a mate prettier [...] is not certain to bar the effect of [...] ugliness';¹⁵⁴ moreover, Grandcourt is also represented as 'a lizard of a hitherto unknown species' (p. 137). Gillian Beer

¹⁵¹ Anon., 'Daniel Deronda', *Graphic*, Saturday 16 September 1876, p. 279.

¹⁵² Anon., 'Daniel Deronda: A Conversation', *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1876, pp. 684-94 (p. 686).

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p. 685.

¹⁵⁴ George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 114. All further references to *Daniel Deronda* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis.

emphasises the more complex evolutionary framework in *Daniel Deronda*, noting that:

The publication of Darwin's *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* in 1871 shifted the focus of evolutionary debate on to man's specific inheritance and future. [...] descent, development, and race are central to *Daniel Deronda*. Sexual selection and the socio-economic elements in genetic choice are part of the book's polemic.¹⁵⁵

The language of *Daniel Deronda*, therefore, still draws upon theories of natural and sexual selection. Furthermore, building upon this evolutionary sub-narrative, a less 'mainstream' but equally influential pseudo-scientific discourse simmers beneath the surface. Having already used phrenological and physiognomical tropes in *The Lifted Veil* (1859) and *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), it is not surprising that images associated with pseudo-scientific practices also appear in Eliot's final novel. The skull of Gwendolen's early suitor, Rex, is described as an 'organ of information' (p. 58) while Mab Meyrick, another minor character, references phrenology in her self-questioning, 'I wonder why he fixed on me as the musical one? Was it because I have a bulging forehead?' (p. 487), and Deronda's Jewish mother is noted for her 'rare perfection of physiognomy' (p. 629), a pseudo-science frequently referred to in *The Mill on the Floss*. Yet, there is a difference between the two novels. As Terence Cave observes, both Eliot and Lewes, who was 'writing his *Problems of Life and Mind* while Eliot was writing *Deronda* [...] [were] interested in psychological phenomena, associating them with fashionable electro-magnetic theories' which brought the mind

¹⁵⁵ Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 182. Diana Postlewaite's 'George Eliot and Science' pp. 98-118 also explores the different use of evolutionary science in *Daniel Deronda*, but does note that '*The Mill on the Floss* anticipates *Daniel Deronda*, another novel filled with watery collisions between inner and outer worlds, ideals made real. "I saw my wish outside me," Gwendolen Harleth confesses to Deronda, describing Grandcourt's drowning at sea [...] the same could be said of Mordecai, Mirah, and Deronda himself. For George Eliot and George Henry Lewes, natural scientist and metaphysician inhabit a continuous cosmos' (p. 114). Tess Cosslett in '*The Scientific Movement*' also recognises the 'inherited social and racial ties in *Daniel Deronda*' (p. 96) while K. M. Newton's 'George Eliot and the Bushman', *Notes and Queries*, n.s. 55:1 (March 2008), pp. 45-56 argues that George Eliot's reference to 'Bosjesman [which] is Dutch for Bushman' (p. 45) draws upon Darwin's research into the descent of man and its relationship to primitive races.

and body together through electric currents, a new and exciting concept in mid-Victorian Britain.¹⁵⁶ There is a sense, therefore, that a juxtaposition between pseudo-science and technology marks a shift in Eliot's focus, offering a new discourse in her final novel.

The Victorian ethos of modern scientific improvement and rationality is reflected in *Daniel Deronda* and contrasted with the ancient Jewish elements. Symbolically, a 'railway train flying in the distance' (p. 131) is a reiterated image throughout the text, emphasising the period's status as a 'modern era of industrial expansion, rapid movement and noise'¹⁵⁷ or, as Grandcourt states, its reputation as 'the age of steam' (p. 158). There is a repeated stress on technology, communication and progress. By contrast to *The Mill on the Floss*, there are references to the 1851 Great Exhibition and its landmark 'Crystal Palace' (p. 398), while the telegraph is often presented as the most efficient and modern mode of communication by the narrative.¹⁵⁸ But there is also a suggestion of underlying connections between technological inventions and pseudo-science and parallels are drawn between what is described as the 'wire of [...] [Grandcourt's] retina' (p. 584) and his suggestively mesmeric rule¹⁵⁹ over Gwendolen as Grandcourt controls his wife's actions as if she

¹⁵⁶ Cave, 'Introduction', pp. ix-xxxv. Pamela Thurschwell's 'George Eliot's Prophecies: Coercive Second Sight and Everyday Thought Reading' in *The Victorian Supernatural*, eds. Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett and Pamela Thurschwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 87-105 and Nicholas Royle's *Telepathy and Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) also explores the issue of clairvoyance in *Daniel Deronda*.

¹⁵⁷ Terence Cave, 'Notes' in *Daniel Deronda* (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 813-47 (p. 819)

¹⁵⁸ In 1837 Samuel F. B. Morse made the first telegraph which could send messages through wires using electricity. This groundbreaking invention reinvented the communication system, making it possible to send instant messages. Placed in context, moreover, the mesmeric phenomena which swept Britain in the early 1830s drew upon the electric telegraph to argue that messages could be transmitted using invisible magnetic 'wires' between the mesmerist and their subject. For more information on the connection between mesmerism and the telegraph see Winter, *Mesmerized*.

¹⁵⁹ For more information on mesmerism in *Daniel Deronda* see Athena Vrettos's 'From Neurosis to Narrative: The Private Life of the Nerves in *Villette* and *Daniel Deronda*', *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 33:4 (1990), pp. 551-79.

were a puppet. Moreover, at an earlier stage of the novel, the touch of Gwendolen's mother is depicted as sending 'an electric charge' (p. 61) through the young woman's body, forcing Gwendolen to fall 'on her knees' (p. 61) and simultaneously a movable panel 'flew open [...] and disclosed the picture of [...] [a] dead face' (p. 61). It is the connection between electricity and restless spirits which, although ignored in Eliot criticism, is most fascinating here, again suggesting that Eliot and Lewes's electromagnetic investigations found their way into her fiction. While this reaction could be brushed aside as coincidence, the narrator is careful to place the initial blame on 'the spirits' (p. 61), questioning if there is a 'medium present' (p. 61) before stating that a spiritual presence must be the cause 'when such things happen' (p. 61): an irrational explanation is the narrator's first reaction. Thus, similarly to Edward Bulwer Lytton and Catherine Crowe's fascination with what they considered to be the scientific magnetic spheres of the spirit world,¹⁶⁰ *Daniel Deronda* also seems to suggest that electricity might play a role in communicating with the dead. But, predictably, this is as far as George Eliot is prepared to venture into the area of spiritualism. Reason and logical thinking intervenes when the panel is quickly re-secured, concealing the dead face before the narrator reveals that there really had 'been a medium concerned in the starting open of the panel [...] [i]t was the small Isabel, whose intense curiosity' prompts the child to 'unlock the panel' and indulge 'her thirst for knowledge' (p. 62). Nonetheless, although the spiritual 'medium' is revealed to be no more than an inquisitive child, the important point here is Eliot's reference to the contemporary belief in the link between electricity and pseudo-science: her subtle allusion to spiritualism blurs the boundaries dividing scientific rationality and the supernatural.

¹⁶⁰ It was the focus of Bulwer Lytton's *The Haunted and the Haunters* (1859) and Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* (1848).

These associations, inevitably, are disturbing rather than comforting. As the novel progresses, a problematic side of *Daniel Deronda* becomes apparent, revealing darker aspects of the narrative linked to magic. Initially, it is the portrayal of Gwendolen as an enchantress, ‘witching the world’ (p. 77) with her beauty which is most closely associated with the supernatural. The archery match with Grandcourt – a decisive moment when she agrees to marry him, ignoring the warnings of Lydia Glasher – is redolent with references to witchcraft as the narrator asks, ‘[w]as there ever a young witch like this?’ (p. 95).¹⁶¹ This, coupled with Gwendolen’s ‘disregarded religious teachings’ (p. 311) locate her as the most obvious witch candidate. Beneath her bewitching exterior, however, Gwendolen is a spoilt but ‘good’ heroine: it is Lydia Glasher, the discarded mistress who becomes the wicked witch of legend. Broken, bitter and sexually rejected by Grandcourt, Lydia’s futile warning to Gwendolen takes on a sinister note. A poison-letter assault, containing Lydia’s ‘curse’ (p. 359) leaves the frightened Gwendolen ‘spell-bound’, ‘petrified’ and screaming in a ‘fit of madness’ (p. 359). Astonishingly, the diamonds, which Grandcourt had previously given to Lydia as a love-token and which he orders Lydia to return so that Gwendolen may have them instead, are transformed into ‘poisoned gems’ as Lydia’s malice seems to enter the ‘poor young creature’ (p. 359) via the necklace. Defiantly, however, Gwendolen burns the poison-pen letter and regains her composure. But the effects of the curse can not be cast aside: as Regina Barreca notes, ‘[c]urses, like promises, are speech acts, in that they embody the action they describe [...] [l]ike

¹⁶¹ Interestingly, Margaret Loewen Reimer’s ‘The Spoilt Child: What Happened to Gwendolen Harleth?’, *Cambridge Quarterly*, n.s 36:1 (2007), pp. 33-51 states that ‘[p]ublisher John Blackwood’s first response to Gwendolen was much like the reaction at the gaming tables: in letters he referred to her as the “mermaid witch” and “fascinating witch” (25 May 1875), and “that wicked witch Gwendolen” (10 Nov. 1875)’ (p. 51).

promises, curses cannot be revoked'.¹⁶² The 'poisoning skill of a sorceress' (p. 555) haunts Gwendolen, and in her eyes Lydia is transformed into an 'apparition' (p. 424) as the 'words of the letter [...] hung on [Gwendolen's] conscience with the weight of prophetic doom' (p. 424), forcing her to 'never wear those diamonds: they had horrible words clinging and crawling about them' (p. 426). By contrast to Gwendolen Harleth and Maggie Tulliver's superficially witch-like characteristics, Lydia Glasher's entire identity is subsumed into sorcery. *Daniel Deronda* addresses the darker nature of the supernatural, a feminine dimension to the novel that conflicts with the straightforward masculine narrative of Deronda's self-fulfilment.

Unlike in *The Mill on the Floss*, the real difficulty emerges when witchcraft is not just a discourse for articulating female desires and frustrations. Throughout *Daniel Deronda*, Gwendolen's enchanting beauty and Lydia's malevolent curses are obvious supernatural aspects but, unexpectedly, the rhetoric of witchcraft extends to the masculine. However, there is a difference: rather than using witchcraft to depict the suggestively deviant woman, sorcery is instead associated with the dissident male protagonist and his journey towards unconventional spirituality. As Daniel Deronda's relationship with Judaism deepens, he is increasingly associated with superstition and witchcraft: Sarah A. Willburn notes that '[u]nlike an Exorcist-esque plot in which possessed agency equals torture for the host body, Deronda's possession equals greater agency and clarity of thought for him'.¹⁶³ Moreover, even in the novel's

¹⁶² Regina Barreca, 'Writing as Voodoo: Sorcery, Hysteria and Art' in *Death and Representation*, ed. Sarah Webster-Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 174-93 (p. 176). Moreover, Barreca states that '[a] curse is complete because it embodies what it represents: it fuses utterance and action. Often the curses given by the characters in these works are the result of a promise broken, some direct result of another character's misunderstanding the terms of an agreement' (p. 176). This analysis can be applied to Lydia and Gwendolen's relationship, especially Gwendolen's broken agreement to not marry Grandcourt.

¹⁶³ Sarah A. Willburn, *Possessed Victorians*, p. 18.

opening chapter set in the casino there is, as James Caron observes, 'a kind of sorcery to the act of gambling'.¹⁶⁴ Horrified by Gwendolen's reckless gaming, Deronda is described as casting an 'evil eye' (p. 10) over the scene, resulting in what Gwendoline superstitiously perceives as the 'goddess of luck' (p. 10) abandoning her. The language here is important: within the framework of witchcraft the gaze of an evil eye was a means of inflicting bad luck, illness or death by 'fascination'.¹⁶⁵ Consequently, the text implicitly positions Deronda as a powerful sorcerer figure. The irrational fear of bewitchment is a theme reiterated in the novel: Gwendolen later explains how Deronda had 'cast an evil eye on [...] [her] play' (p. 330) before feeling his 'eyes fixed on her with a [...] gravely penetrating' (p. 330) gaze, which continues to haunt Gwendolen. As she discloses, 'whatever I do before him, [Deronda] [...] he will cast an evil eye upon it' (p. 409). But rather than what Caron terms Grandcourt's 'mental stranglehold',¹⁶⁶ over Gwendolen, which paralyses her, Deronda's 'evil eye' is ultimately used to protect the woman from herself: her brief addiction to roulette does not reoccur and Deronda is then positioned as her good conscience, a saviour-figure or, as Lance St. John Butler argues, as 'the Christ who saves Gwendolen'.¹⁶⁷ In *Daniel Deronda*, as in *The Mill on the Floss*, Eliot mixes supernatural and Christian allusions, disrupting the realist text. Deronda's association with superstition and sorcery is further complicated by his relationship with Mordecai, a mystical Jew whose passion for occult religious practises lures Deronda away from orthodox Christianity towards a more esoteric supernatural creed.

¹⁶⁴ James Caron, 'The Rhetoric of Magic in *Daniel Deronda*', *Studies in the Novel*, n.s. 15 (1983), pp. 1-9 (p. 2)

¹⁶⁵ Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, *Witchcraft and Magic*, p. 144.

¹⁶⁶ Caron 'Rhetoric of Magic', p. 2.

¹⁶⁷ Butler, *Victorian Doubt*, p. 146. Daniel Deronda as a Christ-figure, as opposed to Grandcourt's anti-Christ depiction, is also foregrounded by Alessandra Grego in 'Scriptural Typology', p. 129.

Superficially, the novel charts Deronda's journey from his Christian upbringing to Judaism. But, as a result of Mordecai's powerful teachings, this is no straightforward conversion: described as the 'consumptive Jew' (p. 471), Mordecai haunts the young man's thoughts and emotions until he is described as a 'figure [...] bitten [...] into Deronda's mind' (p. 471). Unlike Lydia Glasher's curse, which is intended to bring suffering, despair and torment to Gwendolen, Mordecai's ghostly presence almost forces Deronda to rediscover his Jewish heritage and claim his true identity. Although this 'happy ending' should, in theory, provide some sort of narrative closure, the unpredictable occult elements subvert the conventions of realist fiction. Mysteriously eccentric yet strangely powerful, Mordecai confesses to Deronda that he has 'expected [him] to come down the river [...] these five years' (p. 493), patiently waiting on Blackfriars Bridge for his 'prophecy' (p. 493) to be fulfilled: Mordecai sees Deronda as a messiah-figure, believing that the unsuspecting young man is destined to take up his proper position as a preacher of Judaism. While this superstitious language of prophecy seems to have an almost mythological tone or to be, as Alessandra Grego argues, an 'apocalyptic narration',¹⁶⁸ it is the text's construction of the Bridge's sacred position as 'a meeting-place for the spiritual messengers' as 'each order of things has its angel' (p.494) which is significant, emphasising the suggestively divine element of Deronda's presentation. The divide between life and death, natural and supernatural, spiritual and secular blur as Mordecai alludes to a creed controlled by 'Masters' (p. 494) and so foregrounds his earlier conversation with Deronda about the 'notion of the Cabbalists' (p. 473).¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Grego, 'Scriptural Typology', p. 129.

¹⁶⁹ Cave's 'Notes' explains that the 'Caballa (or Kabbala) is the esoteric doctrine of early Jewish mystic theologians, handed on at first from one initiate to another, and later becoming a systematic body of thought. From the Renaissance onwards Cabbalistic doctrines have exerted a considerable fascination with non-Jewish mystical and occult thinkers. G.E was familiar with C.D. Ginsburg's *The Kabbalah: Its Doctrines, Development and Literature* (1865)' (p. 833). For more information on George Eliot,

Eliot's decision to research and focus on the Kabbalistic strand of the Jewish faith, which is predominantly concerned with mystical aspects of this religion, is important. As Saleel Nurbhai and K. M. Newton argue, 'orthodox Judaism viewed the Kabbalah as occult teachings'¹⁷⁰ before emphasising that 'Kabbalistic writings maintain that body and soul are separate [...] before life, and return to being separate after death':¹⁷¹ essentially, Kabbalah is a doctrine which attempts to explain the infinite unknowing Creator and its relationship with the universe through esoteric teachings. As in Edward Bulwer Lytton's earlier esoteric occult novel *Zanoni* (1842), therefore, the progress of the soul, mystical religious practices and the supernatural all merge together in Eliot's narrative. But as Grego notes, 'the conclusion of *Daniel Deronda* provides us with a new world vision of which England and Western History are no

Jewish mysticism and the Kabbala, see Saleel Newton Nurbhai's 'Kabbalistic Myth and Mysticism in George Eliot's Work' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Dundee, 1993); Bernadette Waterman-Ward's 'Zion's Mimetic Angel: George Eliot and *Daniel Deronda*', *Shofar*, n.s. 22:2 (Winter 2004), pp. 105-14. Moreover, the more general role of Judaism in *Daniel Deronda* has been extensively discussed in criticism, see, for example, Anne Aresty Naman's *The Jew in the Victorian Novel: Some Relationships Between Prejudice and Art* (New York: AMS, 1980) which argues that George Eliot replaces negative prejudice with positive prejudice in her treatment of Judaism in the novel; Jules Law's 'Transparency and Epistemology in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, n.s. 62:2 (September 2007), pp. 250-78 which focuses on the figure of the spectral Jew as an indication of Eliot's yearning for a sense of belonging. Moreover, Murray Baumgarten's 'Seeing Double: Jews in the Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Charles Dickens, Anthony Trollope, and George Eliot' in *Between "Race" and Culture: Representations of "the Jew" in English and American Literature*, ed. Brian Cheyette (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 45-61 contrasts *Daniel Deronda*'s more positive characterisation of the Jew with other contemporary depictions. Other useful works on George Eliot and Judaism are Clifford J. Marks's 'Daniel Deronda: Community, Spirituality, and Minor Literature', *Partisan Review*, n.s. 68:3 (Summer 2001), pp. 446-64; Lovesey Oliver's 'The Other Woman in Daniel Deronda', *Studies in the Novel*, n.s. 30:4 (Winter 1998), pp. 505-21; Michael Ragussis's *Figures of Conversion: "The Jewish Question" and English National Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995); Nadia Valman's *The Jewess in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Michael Ragussis's 'The "Secret" of English Anti-Semitism: Anglo-Jewish Studies and Victorian Studies', *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 40:2 (Winter 1997), pp. 295-308; Marguerite Murphy's 'The Ethic of the Gift in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, n.s. 34:1 (March 2006), pp. 189-207; Alice Carroll's *Dark Smiles: Race and Desire in George Eliot* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2002).

¹⁷⁰ Nurbhai and Newton, *Judaism and the Novels*, p. 108. M. D. Bailey in *Magic and Superstition in Europe: A Concise History from Antiquity to Present* (Plymouth: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007), notes how just before the turn of the nineteenth century, '[t]he mesmerist society in Lyon, in particular, had associations with alchemy, Hermetic magic, and Kabbalism' (p. 225), further emphasising the historical close connection between the Kabbalah and occult practices.

¹⁷¹ Nurbhai and Newton, *Judaism and the Novels*, p. 42.

longer the centre'.¹⁷² Consumed by Mordecai's visions of the Promised Land, Deronda's pilgrimage to the East to 'become better acquainted with the condition of [...] [his] race in various countries' (p. 803) is important. Forfeiting a privileged Christian life in England, his radical decision to convert to Judaism, marry a penniless Jewess and travel to the Holy Land is suggestive of not only Eliot's own conflict with Christianity and self-confessed fascination with the history of religion, but also of her experiment with the classic realist genre. The twentieth-century critic F. R. Leavis's dissatisfaction with the unconventional Jewish marriage between Deronda and Mirah, as opposed to Deronda and Gwendolen, led Leavis to carry out an imaginary edit of Eliot's text in which he renames the 'good part of *Daniel Deronda*'¹⁷³ *Gwendolen Harleth*, before stating that *Gwendolen Harleth* would 'be a self-sufficient and substantial whole [...]. Deronda would be confined to [...] lay-confessor to Gwendolen, and the final cut would come after the [...] drowning' of Grandcourt.¹⁷⁴ However, I contend that Eliot's resistance towards conventional realist closure – Gwendolen, the traditional heroine, is left alone and emotionally bruised while Deronda and his Jewish bride depart for the Holy Land – demonstrates Eliot's experimental approach to fiction, arguably prefiguring modernism and the lack of closure of that seems to haunt modernist texts.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Grego, 'Scriptural Typology', p. 130.

¹⁷³ F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition: George Eliot, Henry James, Joseph Conrad* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 103. For further information on Leavis's edition of *Gwendolen Harleth* see Richard Storer's 'Leavis and *Gwendolen Harleth*' in *F. R. Leavis: Essays and Documents*, ed. I. D. Mackillop (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 40–49.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁷⁵ Modernist works often seek to oppress reality rather than simply represent it. However, the term 'modernism' is extremely complex and, as Paul Poplawski remarks in his 'Preface' in *Encyclopedia of Literary Modernism*, ed. Paul Poplawski (Westport: Greenwood, 2003), pp. vii–x 'the field of modernism is a highly complex and hotly contested one, and there is no universal consensus on precisely what constitutes modernism' (p. viii). While this thesis is not exploring the controversial issue of modernism in any respect, I do, however, suggest that *Daniel Deronda*'s lack of conventional closure seems to prefigure modernist writings by, for example, Virginia Woolf. For further information on literary modernism see *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel*, ed. Morag Shiach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

In *Daniel Deronda*, both Christian and Jewish images are repeatedly associated with the East. As Terence Cave notes, for the majority of the narrative Deronda stands as ‘a focal point between a Christian and a Jewish culture’:¹⁷⁶ he represents a ‘new Judea, poised between East and West’ (p. 537), battling to find a balance between his Christian upbringing and a new-found Jewish calling. The narrative often expresses this dilemma by alluding to Egypt. Whether it is Mordecai’s predication that just as ‘the Egyptian could not choose the overflow’ (p. 538) of the Nile, so Deronda cannot escape his Jewish destiny, or Mab’s distress that ‘ancient Ninevah were come again’ (p. 580) after hearing Mirah’s forlorn history, it seems that the Eastern allusions weave an established historical discourse into Eliot’s unconventional Jewish plot. Equally, while the overt narrative structure uses the East to focus upon Deronda’s quest for his true religious identity, less obvious, but equally important, are the non-religious allusions to non-Western cultures. For example, Gwendolen imagines finding ‘the source of the Nile’ (p. 135), Rex realises that his unrequited love for Gwendolen is like an ‘Egyptian [...] [dreaming] of snow’ (p. 58), and Eliot symbolically chooses a quotation from Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra* as an epigraph for the key chapter when Deronda, after discovering his Jewish roots, bids farewell to his mother.¹⁷⁷ Placing *Daniel Deronda* in context, then, the changes witnessed between the 1851 Great Exhibition and its 1854 counterpart – in which the predominantly scientific focus of the 1851 Exhibition shifted as Egyptian Courts were introduced to cater for the public’s new-found fascination with ancient cultures and non-Christian spirituality – are reflected in this later narrative. I suggest that Eliot’s decision to present the East as her ‘happy ending’ seems representative of

¹⁷⁶ Cave, ‘Introduction’, p. xxxi.

¹⁷⁷ The full epigraph is taken from Act 5, Scene 2 of Shakespeare’s *Anthony and Cleopatra* and reads: ‘My desolation does begin to make/ A better life’ (p. 659).

the more general transformation in attitude towards Eastern and middle-Eastern cultures and religions in the British imagination.

In *Daniel Deronda* the conventions of realist fiction are distorted. By weaving together the occult-driven Kabbala with Eastern imagery the reader is left with a disturbing sense that Eliot was playing upon the Victorian preoccupation with what the Victorian spiritualist William Howitt called ‘the prevalence of sorcery all over the East’.¹⁷⁸ Although, as Janet Oppenheim notes, ‘occult systems of belief, like [t]heosophy, which offered [...] extremely precise information about the soul’s progress after death’ and which originated in ‘Eastern religions’¹⁷⁹ were beginning to gain credence in the 1870s when *Daniel Deronda* was published, Eliot’s text seems not to be making any straightforward connection between the occult nature of Kabbala and theosophy. In the aftermath of Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859) and *Descent of Man* (1871), mid-Victorian faith had, undoubtedly, weakened, but George Eliot looked elsewhere than theosophy for alternatives to Christianity. Indeed, her contempt for spiritualism suggests that Eliot’s preoccupation with ancient strands of Judaism has more to do with her interest in the historical aspects of the religion rather than its supernatural claims: as noted earlier, in a letter to her father, dated 28 February 1842, Eliot had stated that ‘I regard these writings [Christian and Jewish Scriptures] as histories consisting of mingled truth and fiction’.¹⁸⁰ Importantly, as

¹⁷⁸ Howitt, *History of the Supernatural*, p. 196.

¹⁷⁹ Janet Oppenheim, review of Michael Wheeler, *Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature and Theology*, *Albion*, n.s. 24:2 (Summer 1992), pp. 338-39 (p. 339). Theosophy (meaning ‘god wisdom’ in Greek) is an esoteric religion based upon Eastern occult beliefs including reincarnation and karma (the belief that everyone should be treated as equals). Significantly for this thesis, Madame Blavatsky (1831-91) founded the Theosophy Society in 1875 and began the process of popularising the movement in both America and England, attracting supporters such as the English author Annie Besant (1847-1933). Chapter Three of this thesis will explore theosophy in greater detail.

¹⁸⁰ Eliot, *Letters*, I, p. 128.

Terence Cave observes, Eliot perceived 'religious beliefs [...] as analogous'¹⁸¹ to each other, suggesting that she saw parallels between Christianity and Judaism: the author looks to the past and treats religious history as anthropology rather than theology. Angelique Richardson suggests that 'George Eliot seeks, in the absence of God, stability in the past'¹⁸² and her insistent examination of past Christian, Jewish and Kabbalistic beliefs signify that religious beliefs were important to the formation of her fictional characters.

Ultimately, therefore, while Eliot certainly knew a great deal about theology, science and esoteric religions of the east, this thesis contends that rather than seeking an alternative belief for her own lost Christianity, she deliberately utilises religious and supernatural discourses in her fiction in order to evoke specific meaning; her witch imagery allows for the expression of unconventional femininity, the medieval religious hysteria becomes a kind of metaphor for repressed sexual desire while *Daniel Deronda's* preoccupation with ancient Jewish mysticism signals Eliot's anthropological fascination. Consequently, it is in this literary and historical context that religion was important to her. I position the later realist author Thomas Hardy, however, as the inheritor of Eliot's doubts. Hardy experienced a similar loss of religious faith but, in contrast to his female predecessor, he uses different narrative techniques in his own search for a substitute for Christianity. In works such as *The Return of the Native*, Hardy's narrative turns instead to an older, darker, Pagan world. Indeed, his own open rejection of Church of England doctrine, in addition to his preoccupation with nature, the implicitly pagan superstitions of Dorset and life after death, suggest a pantheistic credo which differentiates his work from that of Eliot.

¹⁸¹ Cave, 'Introduction', p. xx.

¹⁸² Angelique Richardson, 'Hardy and Science' in *Palgrave Advances in Thomas Hardy Studies*, ed. Phillip Mallett (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004), pp. 156-80 (p. 171).

III - Thomas Hardy

(i)

Born in the Dorset hamlet of Higher Bockhampton on 2 June 1840, Thomas Hardy's (1840-1928) rustic childhood was a strong influence upon his literary career. Famous for immortalising this upbringing in the Wessex landscape which dominates almost all of his novels, Hardy's fictional world is often intertwined with the real. As Michael Millgate points out, Hardy obtained an 'intimate knowledge of the surrounding countryside, the hard and sometimes violent lives of [...] rural families, and the songs, stories, superstitions [and] seasonal rituals' which prevailed throughout mid-nineteenth century Dorset and are reflected in his novels.¹⁸³ With regard to Hardy's life-story, moreover, Robert Gittings observes that 'Thomas Hardy [was] determined to set up a barrier against biography' by writing 'his own life, or what he cared to tell of it, in the third person, to be passed off as a biography written by',¹⁸⁴ his second wife Florence Hardy (*née* Dugdale).¹⁸⁵ In effect, Hardy wrote his own biography but this plan ultimately failed. In contrast to a clear and concise life-story, what remains is a complex and often contradictory picture of a complex man.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ Michael Millgate, 'Hardy, Thomas (1840–1928)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, Sept 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33708> [accessed 10 June 2009]. For more general information on superstition see Gustav Jahoda's *The Psychology of Superstition* (London: Allen Lane, 1969) and K. R. Foster and H. Kokko's 'The Evolution of Superstition and Superstition-like Behaviour', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of London*, n.s. 276: 1654 (2009), pp. 31-38.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 1.

¹⁸⁵ Although Thomas Hardy's was the real author behind Florence Emily Hardy's *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928*, I am going to reference this work as Florence Hardy's.

¹⁸⁶ There has been a wealth of scholarly research into various aspects of Thomas Hardy's biography. Notable works include Michael Millgate's *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), Michael Millgate's *Thomas Hardy: His Career as a Novelist* (London: Bodley Head, 1971) and Millgate's more recent work, *Thomas Hardy: A Biography Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Other noted works include Evelyn Hardy's *Thomas Hardy* (London: Hogarth Press, 1954), Edmund Blunden, *Thomas Hardy* (London: Macmillan, 1942), Ernst Brennecke, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (New York: Greenberg, 1925), Carl Weber, *Hardy of Wessex: His Life and Literary Career* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1940), Timothy O'Sullivan, *Thomas Hardy: An Illustrated Biography* (London: Macmillan 1975) or what Rosemarie Morgan in 'Guide to this Year's Work: Thomas Hardy', *Victorian Poetry*, n.s. 44:3 (Fall 2006), pp. 311-87 terms as 'the plague on all of Hardy's houses, Ernest Brennecke, with his infamous *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (New York, 1925)'

Nowhere is this more apparent than in his religious biography which, as Timothy Hands discusses, 'encompassed a period of exceptional religious vigour, debate, and uncertainty'.¹⁸⁷ Pamela Dalziel further describes how, as a child, Hardy 'regularly attended the parish church of Stinsford, with which his family had longstanding connections'¹⁸⁸ while further research into the author's early years describes him as having, like Eliot, 'a personal faith of a distinctly Evangelical cast'.¹⁸⁹ Interestingly, Timothy Hands observes that as early as 1852 Hardy 'helped the vicar's sons in the instruction of the Sunday school'¹⁹⁰ and on 24 October 1858, while still in the third year of his articles to a Dorchester architect, Hardy wrote an 'Evangelical style'¹⁹¹ sermon, suggesting his faithful desire to become a country curate.¹⁹² Furthermore, Hardy was profoundly influenced by the Stinsford church choir, famously depicted as the Mellstock choir in *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872) which, as Dennis Taylor discusses, 'assumed an orthodox Anglican world'.¹⁹³ More specifically, Jan Jedrzejewski notes that 'the music and ceremonial of Christian liturgy were to become

(p. 311). For more recent publications see Claire Tomalin's *Thomas Hardy: A Time-Torn Man* (London: Viking, 2006) and Ralph Pite's *Thomas Hardy: The Guarded Life* (London: Picador, 2006).

¹⁸⁷ Timothy Hands, 'Religion' in *The Oxford Reader's Companion to Hardy*, ed. Norman Page (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 360-65.

¹⁸⁸ Pamela Dalziel, '"The Hard Case of the Would-be-Religious": Hardy and the Church from Early Life to Later Years' in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 71-85 (p. 72).

¹⁸⁹ Pamela Dalziel, 'The Gospel According to Hardy' in *Thomas Hardy Reappraised: Essays in Honour of Michael Millgate*, ed. Keith Wilson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 3-19 (p. 11).

¹⁹⁰ Timothy Hands, *Thomas Hardy: Distracted Preacher? Hardy's Religious Biography and its Influence on his Novels* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), p. 5. Significantly, Hands later states that he later turned to the vicar 'whose sermons he had once imitated and impishly mimicked when he became involved in a lengthy dispute with a fellow architectural pupil, Henry Robert Bastow, over the merits of infant baptism' (pp. 5-6). This was an issue that Hardy would later address in his fiction. For example, in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891) Tess is desperate for her dying baby Sorrow to receive a Christian burial and is forced to perform the baptism herself while in *Jude the Obscure* (1895), Sue Bridehead is shocked to learn that Little Father Time has not been baptised as if he 'died in damnation, 'twould save the expense of a Christian funeral', see *Jude the Obscure* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 280.

¹⁹¹ Dalziel, 'Strange Sermon', p. 12.

¹⁹² Norman Vance in 'Secular Apocalyptic and Thomas Hardy', *History of European Ideas*, n.s. 26 (2000), pp. 201-10 further notes that 'Hardy's own architectural training and practice included church architecture and restoration work' (p. 202), emphasising how even his early vocation was tied into Christianity.

¹⁹³ Dennis Taylor, 'Jude the Obscure and English National Identity: The Religious Striations of Wessex' in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 345-63 (p. 346)

for him direct points of reference and sources of imaginative inspiration from a very early age'.¹⁹⁴ But, as with many aspects of Hardy's life, this was soon to change. Similarly to Eliot's break with Christian dogma, Thomas Hardy would retain an interest in Christianity as history but not as religion. Although, as Robert Schweik notes, 'he remained emotionally involved with the Church',¹⁹⁵ especially with regard to Church music, Hardy's theological connections insidiously but insistently evolved into agnosticism.¹⁹⁶

Hardy experienced a gradual erosion, rather than a sudden loss, of faith: as Ian Gregor states, '[t]here is nothing in his autobiography [...] that could remotely be called "a dark night of the soul"'.¹⁹⁷ More specifically, Pamela Dalziel emphasises that '[t]heological discussion was evidently a common feature of Hardy's youthful friendships';¹⁹⁸ his close relationship with Horace Moule, son of the Evangelical vicar of Fordington, provided the young man with ample opportunity for intellectual

¹⁹⁴ Jan Jedrzejewski, *Thomas Hardy and the Church* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 123. Jedrzejewski also reiterates that Hardy's later admiration for Church music 'was always [...] restricted to its purely human, social, and aesthetic aspects; on many occasions, its beauty would in fact bring Hardy to contemplate the impossibility of religious belief or at least his own inability to accept it' (p. 124).

¹⁹⁵ Robert Schweik, 'The Influence of Religion, Science, and Philosophy on Hardy's Writings' in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 54-71 (p. 55).

¹⁹⁶ Robert Schweik in 'The Influence of Religion' declares that 'Hardy became an agnostic' (p. 55) and Lance St. Butler in *Victorian Doubt* further labels him as 'the agnostic Thomas Hardy' (p. 6). Nonetheless, some critics have drawn attention to the complex nature of his agnosticism. Norman Vance in 'George Eliot and Hardy' in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. Andrew Hass, David Jasper, Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 483-98 explains that 'George Eliot would have rejected the label "atheist", and despite his anti-religious grumblings it does not sit entirely comfortably on Hardy either' (p. 484). Moreover, as Mary Rimmer in '"My Scripture Manner": Reading Hardy's Biblical and Liturgical Allusion' in *Thomas Hardy Reappraised: Essays in Honour of Michael Millgate*, ed. Keith Wilson (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2006), pp. 20-37, states, '[f]ew agnostics present such vexed and contradictory attitudes towards the sacred as Hardy' (p. 32). While the extent to which Hardy was an atheist is a topic often discussed in scholarship, what I am interested in is that fact that Hardy had a fraught relationship with Christianity throughout his life. Similarly to Robert Schweik, I am going to foreground the agnostic elements of his biography which seem to position him alongside George Eliot. The important point for this thesis is that Hardy's religious unconventionality is enough to bracket him as an agnostic.

¹⁹⁷ Ian Gregor, 'Contrary Imaginings: Thomas Hardy and Religion' in *The Interpretation of Belief: Coleridge, Schleiermacher and Romanticism*, ed. David Jasper (London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 202-24 (p. 205).

¹⁹⁸ Pamela Dalziel, 'Strange Sermon: the Gospel According to Thomas Hardy', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 17 March 2006, pp. 12-13 (p. 12).

debate. Nevertheless, his movement away from Evangelicalism is well documented and, ironically, it was Moule who, in April 1858, regardless of his father's teachings, gave Hardy a gift of Gideon Algernon Mantell's *The Wonders of Geology* (1838) which, as Dalziel notes, 'had led to a Moule family conflict similar to that depicted in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* when Angel orders an irreligious book'.¹⁹⁹ Importantly, as with many mid-Victorian intellectuals, it is geological debate which acted as a catalyst for religious doubt. In Hardy's work, located on the 'Jurassic' Dorset coast, geology is a recurring feature, most notably in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873). It seems that his gradual loss of faith was encouraged by geological findings, evolutionary theories and controversial publications such as *Essays and Reviews*, which Hardy read shortly after its 1860 publication, and which he describes in *Life* as 'impressing him much'²⁰⁰ when it was 'suggested to him by his mentor-friend Horace Moule'.²⁰¹ Significantly, in April 1862, in the aftermath of both *Origin of Species* and *Essays and Reviews*, Hardy left Dorset for London, a move which would prove to challenge further his already faltering faith.

Arriving in London as an architectural draughtsman, Hardy strove to immerse himself in the intellectually vibrant metropolis.²⁰² It is hardly surprising that some aspects of his country ways had to go: as Lance St. Butler observes, 'there is a striking parallel between his emergence into the big world of London [...] with its attendant

¹⁹⁹ Dalziel, 'Strange Sermon', p. 12. For further information on Hardy and Geology see Patricia Ingham's 'Hardy and *The Wonders of Geology*', *Review of English Studies*, n.s. 31 (1980), pp. 59-69.

²⁰⁰ Florence Emily Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy 1840-1928* (London: Macmillan, 1962), p. 33. It is relevant to reiterate that although this work was published under the name of Florence Hardy, it was Thomas Hardy who actually wrote the biography in the third person and intended it to be published under Florence's name. For further information on Hardy's interest in the controversial publication see David J. de Laura's "'The Ache of Modernism'" in Hardy's later Novels', *ELH*, n.s. 34:3 (September 1967), pp. 380-99.

²⁰¹ Jedrzejewski, *Hardy and the Church*, p. 12.

²⁰² For further information on London years (1862-67), see Keith Wilson's 'Hardy of London' in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 146-61.

loss of faith in the rural community [...] and his loss of religious faith'.²⁰³ But most significant in Hardy's disillusion with Christianity was what B. J. Alexander terms as the author's 'rejection of the existence of a "good" God',²⁰⁴ a rejection also foregrounded by George Levine, who states that 'for both Hardy and Darwin the most telling criticism of Christian theism was the fact of human suffering' emphasising that '[n]either could believe that an all-loving and all-knowing God could have been responsible for the horrors and tragedies of human (and animal) experience'.²⁰⁵ The connection between Thomas Hardy and Charles Darwin is important. *Life* famously declared that '[a]s a young man he had been among the earliest acclaimers of *The Origin of Species*'²⁰⁶ and Hardy attended Darwin's Westminster funeral in April 1882, suggesting a support for investigation into natural selection that aligned him with other 'agnostics' such as George Eliot.²⁰⁷ Moreover, in line with Eliot's reservations about and final dismissal of the supernatural aspects of the Gospels, Hardy also 'could not receive the Bible as truth',²⁰⁸ doubting its miraculous claims and expressing what Harold Orel terms 'dismay [...] [at] its supernatural assertions'.²⁰⁹ Surrounded by debates about biblical history, therefore, the Evangelical leanings of Hardy's youth were replaced by a profound interest in science and scientific explanation.

²⁰³ Butler, *Victorian Doubt*, p. 191.

²⁰⁴ B. J. Alexander, 'Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*: A Rejection of Traditional Christianity's "Good" God Theory', *Southern Quarterly*, n.s. 3 (1964), pp. 74-82 (p. 75).

²⁰⁵ George Levine, 'Hardy and Darwin: An Enchanted Hardy?' in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 36-53 (p. 41).

²⁰⁶ Florence Hardy, *Life*, p. 153.

²⁰⁷ Interestingly, the connection between Hardy and Eliot has been made on a number of levels. For example, when Hardy serialized *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) in *The Cornhill Magazine*, R. H. Hutton, a critic for the *Spectator*, 3 January 1874, pp. 1597-99 commented in his article 'Far From the Madding Crowd' that "[i]f *Far from the Madding Crowd* is not written by George Eliot, then there is a new light among novelists" (p. 1597). However, as Michael Alexander notes in 'The Thomas Hardy Birthday Lecture 2005', *P.N. Review*, n.s. 32:2 (2005), pp. 23-28, 'Hardy resented it when critics attributed his rustic scenes to the pen, or the influence, of George Eliot' (p. 24).

²⁰⁸ Rimmer, "My Scripture Manner", p. 32. Hardy also owned an 1898 edition of George Eliot's translation of Strauss's *The Life of Jesus* which dismissed the supernaturally inspired miracles of the Gospels. For more information see Thomas Hardy, *Thomas Hardy's "Facts" Notebook*, ed. William Greenslade (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) which reproduces Hardy's own notes on the subject.

²⁰⁹ Harold Orel, 'After *The Dynasts*: Hardy's Relationship to Christianity' in *Budmouth Essays on Thomas Hardy*, ed. Frank Pinion (Dorchester: Hardy Society, 1976), pp. 180-91 (p. 183).

Thomas Hardy's enthusiasm for Darwinian theories of natural and sexual selection, and its assimilation in his fiction, have received much critical attention.²¹⁰ As Carl Weber notes, Hardy's often quoted declaration that he regarded 'Darwin, Huxley, Spencer, Comte, Hume, Mill'²¹¹ as the thinkers most influential to him suggests his movement away from orthodox religion, bringing the author more in line with radical scientific thinking and, more specifically, with what Robert Gilmour describes as 'the bleak site of evolutionary struggle'.²¹² In a context of post-Darwinian biblical doubt, and as a result of Hardy's growing friendships with the rationalist Leslie Stephen and scientific-minded Edward Clodd, Gilmour notes:

²¹⁰ Perhaps most notably, Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plots* addresses Hardy's depiction of cultural evolution before concluding that 'Like Darwin, he [Hardy] feels the problem of anthropomorphism in describing a natural order not centred on man' (p. 258) as well as Gillian Beer's *Open Fields: Science in Cultural Encounter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). Other useful works which focus on Hardy and evolution are Roger Ebbatson's *Evolutionary Self: Hardy, Forster, Lawrence* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982), John Alcorn's *The Nature Novel from Hardy to Lawrence* (London: Macmillan, 1977), William Greenslade's *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Illaria Mallozzi's 'Darwin, Hardy, and Bergson – A Glimpse of Continuity?', *Hardy Review*, n.s. 11:2 (Autumn 2009), pp. 133-40 and Phillip Mallett's 'Noticing Things: Hardy and the Nature of Nature' in *The Achievement of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Phillip Mallett (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 155-69 which notes Hardy's use of the Darwinian image of an entangled bank – as representative of nature's evolutionary struggle – in a scene in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *Return of the Native*. Other critics who have also analysed Hardy's entangled bank imagery are Paul Turner in *The Life of Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998) and John Glendening's *The Evolutionary Imagination*. Furthermore, a great deal of criticism centres upon *The Woodlanders* (1887) and evolution. See, for example, David Lodge's 'Introduction' in *The Woodlanders* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 13-32 and George Levine's 'The Woodlanders and the Darwinian Grotesque' in *Thomas Hardy Reappraised: Essays in Honour of Michael Millgate*, ed. Keith Wilson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), pp. 174-98. Another excellent work which explores that impact of Darwin's shift in focus from natural selection to sexual selection is Angelique Richardson's 'Hardy and Biology' in *Thomas Hardy: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Phillip Mallett (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 156-79. Angelique Richardson's *Love and Eugenics among Late-Victorians: Science, Fiction, Feminism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) is a work which, although it does not focus specifically on Hardy, documents the expression of eugenics, a term coined in 1889 by Darwin's cousin Frances Galton to define selective breeding in humans, in popular late-Victorian culture. As a result of a recent article by George Levine, 'Hardy and Darwin' which states that 'I am, however, just a little tired of the inevitable catching of Darwinian strains in Hardy just where there is a stress, competition, chance, struggle, and suffering. There is by now little need to elaborate and refine this side of the argument. Darwin is there' (p. 36), I am not going to provide a further Darwinian reading of Hardy. I aim to reiterate Darwin's influence upon Hardy's biography rather than trace any fictional allusions to evolution in his texts.

²¹¹ Carl Weber, *Hardy of Wessex: His Life and Literary Career* (London: Routledge, 1965), pp. 246-7.

²¹² Gilmour, *The Victorian Period*, p. 132.

the major novels he [Hardy] published in this decade – *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *The Return of the Native* (1878) – show the start of his movement away from Victorian pastoralism to the unconsoling natural universe of Darwin and Huxley.²¹³

Hardy's interest in science and pseudo-science seemed to gain impetus during the decade following Darwin's *Origin*, with *Life* clearly stating that in 1863 'Dr. Donovan the phrenologist gauged heads in the Strand, informing Hardy that his would lead to no good'.²¹⁴ While Hardy's phrenological interest was nowhere near as intense as Eliot's head-shaving episode suggests or Catherine Crowe's avid following of the acclaimed phrenologist George Combe demonstrates, Hardy was clearly interested in science and pseudo-science in this period of his life. However, as Gayle Holste notes, 'Hardy assumed that expanding scientific knowledge would ultimately lead to rejection of religious beliefs by advanced societies'.²¹⁵ Underlying this scientific interest and lack of religious faith was his insistence upon the importance of the Church's social, rather than ecclesiastical, role. Timothy Hands notes how Hardy:

"could not forget", [...] that the church was in the old days the centre of all the musical, literary and artistic education in the country village". Hardy thought the Church "a thing indispensable"; "If there is no church in a country village," he told a friend in 1922, "there is nothing."²¹⁶

Hardy's underlying support for the moral and social function of religion may explain his fascination with Auguste Comte's quasi-religious Positivism.

²¹³ *ibid.*, p.103. Another work which focuses on science in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, especially its astronomical accuracies, is Anne deWitt "'The Actual Sky is a Horror": Thomas Hardy and the Arnoldian Conception of Science', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, n.s. 61:4 (2007), pp. 479-506 as well as Tess Cosslett's *Scientific Movement* which devotes a chapter to Hardy's fiction.

²¹⁴ Florence Hardy, *Life*, p. 41. Angelique Richardson in 'Hardy and Science' also draws attention to his phrenological examination, emphasising how during this time he also 'knew the scientists James Crichton-Browne and Ray Lankester, took notes from a *Spectator* review of [Frances] Galton's *Inquiries into the Human Faculty and its Development* (in which the term "eugenics" first appeared), [and] attended at least one meeting of the Eugenics Education Society' (p. 163).

²¹⁵ Gayle Holste, 'Hardy's "Christmas in The Elgin Room"', *Explicator*, n.s. 59:4 (Summer 2001), pp. 187-89 (p. 189).

²¹⁶ Hands, *Distracted Preacher?*, p. 98. A letter published by J. H. Morgan in *The Times* on 19 January 1928 during the aftermath of Hardy's death further reiterates his fraught relationship with the Church, stating that 'he said:- "I believe in going to church. It is a moral drill, and people must have something. If there is no church in a country village, there is nothing' (p.8). Again, the important point here is Hardy's belief in the Church's instructive role: it is only necessary to morally educating the public.

Positivist philosophy pervades Thomas Hardy and George Eliot's lives and works. Although, as Norman Vance observes, they were both 'selectively attracted to Comte and the Comtean "Religion of Humanity"',²¹⁷ there is an important difference: George Levine points out that Hardy's 'fictional worlds are places of thought, yes, but, unlike George Eliot, he is not a philosophical novelist', emphasising how he 'rejected the idea that his art was governed by ideas, Darwin's or Schopenhauer's or Spencer's or Comte's or Mill's. They are "seemings"'.²¹⁸ Hardy did not create Positivist fiction yet, as Phillip Mallett observes, Hardy 'read widely if unsystematically in philosophy'²¹⁹ and undoubtedly engaged with various Comtean ideas. This is clear in his reaction to the *Spectator*'s inaccurate assumption that *Far from the Madding Crowd* was written by George Eliot: *Life* states that 'he conjectured, as a possible reason for the flattering guess, that he had latterly been reading Comte's *Positive Philosophy*' and that 'some of whose expressions had thus passed into his vocabulary, expressions which were also common to George Eliot'.²²⁰ Similarly, Phillip Mallett notes that in '1976, before embarking on *The Return of the Native* [...] Hardy allowed himself a sabbatical year, during which he read and made notes on [...] Comte's *Social Dynamics*' which may explain the seemingly regressive presentation of superstition in *The Return of the Native* and, similarly to Maggie's mutilated doll in *The Mill on the Floss*, Hardy's inclusion of a waxen figure as a type

²¹⁷ Vance, 'Eliot and Hardy', pp. 483-84.

²¹⁸ Levine, 'Hardy and Darwin', p. 45.

²¹⁹ Phillip Mallett, 'Hardy and Philosophy' in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 21-35 (p. 21). Mallett's article on the philosophical influences upon Hardy's fiction is the most in-depth analysis on the subject. Nevertheless, similarly to the George Eliot section of this thesis, I am not going to go into a great deal of detail on the topic of Hardy and Comte; the emphasis of my work is on the fact that Comte's quasi-religious ideas were an influence on Hardy, suggestively providing a different religious discourse for the author and his ever-weakening Church of England faith. I am, however, grateful to Phillip Mallett for his continued help and guidance on the topic of Hardy and Comte. For further information on Comte see Richardson's 'Hardy and Science' and Schweik's 'Influence of Religion, Science, and Philosophy'.

²²⁰ Florence Hardy, *Life*, p. 98.

of fetish doll.²²¹ Interestingly, moreover, it is his attitude towards Comte's attempts to establish a Positivist Church which demonstrates Hardy's more general perspective on organised religion. Again, *Life* states:

[i]f Comte had introduced Christ among the worthies in his calendar it would have made Positivism tolerable to thousands who, from position, family connection, or early education, now decry what in their heart of hearts they hold to contain the germs of a true system. It would have enabled them to modulate gently into the new religion by deceiving themselves with the sophistry that they still contained one-quarter Christians.²²²

Yet, although Hardy seemed to engage with Comte's ideas, he did not wholly subscribe to them. Mallett suggests that Hardy 'told Agnes Grove in 1903 that "I am not a Positivist"' although he added that "no person of serious thought in these times could be said to stand aloof from Positivist teaching & ideals".²²³ Again, I suggest that there are parallels between Eliot's selective use of Comte's Positivism and Hardy's inability to commit fully to this new religion. In his search for a substitute for Christianity, Hardy engaged with another school of religious thought. But, regardless of his religious reservations, his faith in any creed was never strong: after losing his early Evangelical beliefs, Hardy remained a cynic about religious faith for the rest of his life.

Thomas Hardy's relationship with Christianity is complex. Mary Rimmer foregrounds the complications, emphasising how his fictional allusions to the Bible

²²¹ Although I will be discussing *The Return of the Native* in greater detail in the following part of the Thomas Hardy section, it is interesting to note that in this work there is a suggestion that Hardy is, albeit unconsciously, harking back to Comte, and the idea that human knowledge passes through three stages, the theological, metaphysical and positivist (as discussed in the George Eliot section). The former he also subdivides into three ascending stages: fetishism, polytheism, monotheism. But my point would be that for Hardy, as for Comte, all three are regressive, all are - in effect - superstitions only, and a derogation from rational thought; to slip back into one is to risk slipping back into all. This is most apparent in the Hardy's presentation of Susan Nunsuch and her superstitious attempts at counter-bewitchment. Although I will not be conducting a Comtean reading of the novel, it is interesting to note that certain elements of the witchcraft elements may have been influenced by Hardy's reading of Comtean fetishism.

²²² Florence Hardy, *Life*, p. 146.

²²³ Mallett, 'Hardy and Philosophy', p. 22.

and Book of Common Prayer complicate matters ‘because he as always travelling away from belief in the sacred without ever quite leaving it behind’, later adding that Hardy’s ‘1890 note, “I have been looking for God 50 years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him”’ is often taken as evidence of his agnostic loss of faith.²²⁴ His search for God seems to have taken the unconventional author in a number of directions, moving away from the Evangelicalism of his youth towards Darwinian theories of evolution before investigating Positivism. Hardy, like George Eliot, is more of an investigator of rather than a believer in religion. Yet, I suggest that he was always searching for something quasi-religious to replace his eroded Christian faith: as Pamela Dalziel notes, ‘he ceased to believe in Christian orthodoxy until his death at eighty-seven’.²²⁵ It is in this context, therefore, that I argue Hardy explored older, non-Christian discourses in *The Return of the Native* (1878) and ‘The Withered Arm’ (1888), which both revert to a pantheistic depiction of a past, rural Wessex. Indeed, by contrast to the wealth of literary criticism on Hardy and religion, this thesis does not attempt to document his erosion of faith. While it is important to emphasise Hardy’s agnosticism, I suggest that he uses ancient superstitions as vehicles to carry meaning while simultaneously going some way to act as a replacement for his lost Christianity.

²²⁴ Rimmer, “‘My Scripture Manner’”, p. 20.

²²⁵ Dalziel, ‘The Gospel’, p. 4. It is also interesting that towards the end of his married life with Emma Lavinia Hardy (*née* Gifford) Hardy’s loss of orthodox faith jarred considerably with her devout Christianity. This was one of the causes for further marital discord – which seems to have started in 1880s – and which resulted in Emma permanently retreating to the seclusion of the attic rooms in 1898 at their Dorset house, Max Gate. Significantly, their strange marital estrangement continued up until her death on 27 November 1912 after which he penned a wealth of poems, often linked to Emma, and first published in *Satires of Circumstance* (1914). For further information see, Denys Ray-Robinson’s *The First Mrs. Thomas Hardy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), *Letters of Emma and Florence Hardy*, ed. Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996) and William W. Morgan’s ‘Life Story: A Biography of Hardy’s “Emma Poems”’, *Thomas Hardy Journal*, n.s. 24 (Autumn 2008), pp. 61-90.

(ii)

Building upon the success of early works such as *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873) and *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874), Thomas Hardy's sixth novel, *The Return of the Native* (1878), was serialized in *Belgravia* and, as Phillip Mallett notes, was his first 'ambitious attempt at high tragedy'.²²⁶ Moving away from the pastoral romance depicted in *Under the Greenwood Tree* and *Far from the Madding Crowd*, *The Return of the Native*²²⁷ denied the reader a happy ending and prefigured the discord that would characterise his later fiction, most notably *Jude the Obscure* (1895). Set in the 1840s, *The Return of the Native* follows the wildly passionate Eustacia Vye, a young woman living in the wilderness of Wessex's Egdon Heath, but longing to escape her rural surroundings and to be 'loved to madness'.²²⁸ Jilted by Damon Wildeve when he tires of their implicitly sexual relationship and instead marries Thomasin Yeobright, Eustacia turns her attention towards Thomasin's cousin, Clym Yeobright, a Paris-based jewel merchant who has recently returned home from France. Despite a degree of interference from Diggory Venn, the local reddleman, Clym and Eustacia marry against the wish of Clym's socially-conscious mother, Mrs. Yeobright, and set up home in Egdon Heath.²²⁹ While Eustacia dreams of moving to Paris, Clym's ambitions are firmly set on establishing a local school

²²⁶ Phillip Mallett, 'Preface to the Second Edition' in *The Return of the Native* (New York and London: Norton, 2006), pp. ix-xii (p. x).

²²⁷ Rosemarie Morgan in *The Student Companion to Thomas Hardy* (Westport: Greenwood, 2007), p. 73 discusses the significance of *The Return of the Native*'s title, exploring the complexities of defining who or what the 'native' may be: 'how is the "native" determined? Simplistically by the return of Clym, more complexly by the return of Wessex or thematically by the return of some of Egdon's denizens to its own earth?' (p. 73).

²²⁸ Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 71. All further references to *The Return of the Native* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis.

²²⁹ Tony Slade in 'Notes' in *The Return of the Native* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 397-428 observes that a 'reddleman is one who sells or deals in "reddle", a form of red ochre dye once widely used by shepherds and farmers to mark and identify sheep' (p. 398). Significantly, a constant exposure to reddle stains human skin, marking the body for an extended period of time. Diggory Venn's close contact with reddle explains his red appearance.

where he may work closely with the rural community. These ambitions, for both parties, are thwarted. An illness leaves Clym partially sighted and forced to earn a living furze-cutting and his marriage to Eustacia begins to deteriorate before falling apart in spectacular style when Clym blames his wife for his mother's death. Following an intense argument which leaves her estranged from her husband, Eustacia slips into a deep depression. Socially isolated and confined to her family home on Egdon Heath, she accepts Wildeve's offer of money, intended to help Eustacia escape and start a new life away from Egdon Heath, but which ultimately leads to both of their deaths: Wildeve's attempt at saving Eustacia from drowning fails. While Hardy deliberately leaves the cause of Eustacia's death by drowning ambiguous – suicide, a tragic accident or even malign witchcraft are all possibilities – he clearly intended an unhappy ending for his heroine, only consenting to a marriage between the secondary characters of Thomasin and Venn after editorial pressure.²³⁰

It is this unconventional narrative conclusion which elicited a mixed response from contemporary critics. Although the *Graphic* observed that Hardy 'was never

²³⁰ Rosemarie Morgan in 'Conflicting Courses in *The Return of the Native*' in *The Return of the Native*, ed. Phillip Mallett (London and New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 474-89 comments on Hardy's difficulty in finding a publisher for his novel, noting that the *Cornhill Magazine* – which had serialized *Far from the Madding Crowd* – rejected the script on the grounds that it was unsuitable for its audience, forcing Hardy to look elsewhere until *Belgravia* agreed to its publication after certain changes. Morgan comments that [p]redictably, given the rejection of editors when he submitted *The Return of the Native* for serial publication, he feigned an appearance of decorum, revising the last chapters to provide a conventional marriage for Thomasin; but Eustacia, wild and nonconformist, would flee her ties and remain unclaimed' (p. 478). Moreover, she also emphasises how, in 1912, Hardy 'added [...] [a] footnote: "The writer may state here that the original conception of the story did not design a marriage between Thomasin and Venn. [...] But certain circumstances of serial publication led to a change of intent. Readers can therefore choose between the endings"' (p. 478). For further information see Simon Gatrell's 'The Textual History of *The Return of the Native*' in *The Return of the Native*, ed. Phillip Mallett (London and New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 343-62 and Andrew Nash's '*The Return of the Native* and *Belgravia*' in *The Return of the Native*, ed. Phillip Mallett (London and New York: Norton, 2006), pp. 363-70.

happier than when revelling in emotional subtleties',²³¹ other periodicals offered mixed responses. The *Saturday Review* claimed that 'there is a rising school of novelists, of which Mr. Hardy is one of the ablest members' but also noted that in *The Return of the Native*, '[t]he faults of *Far from the Madding Crowd* are exaggerated'.²³² Likewise, the *Athenaeum* noted that 'Mr. Hardy [...] has published a book distinctly inferior to anything of his which we have yet read'.²³³ Possibly as a result of its differences to his earlier works, *The Return of the Native* was, as Penny Boumelha notes 'close to a failure, both commercially and critically'.²³⁴ Nonetheless, this novel was certainly successful in bringing Hardy's Wessex to the foreground, as had *Far from the Madding Crowd* some four years earlier.

Much of the time, Hardy's rural settings are used to depict isolated communities, country superstitions and the influence of the natural world upon its inhabitants. In *The Return of the Native*, the narrative contains brief allusions to Darwinian ideas of evolution and its impact upon nature. Although Hardy was profoundly influenced by Darwin's controversial publications, unlike Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss*, natural selection, sexual selection or scientific explanations are not key features of Hardy's novel. While critics such as George Levine, Gillian Beer and Phillip Mallett have drawn attention to Hardy's subtle manipulation of these themes in a number of his works, I want to focus on the irrational aspects of *The Return of the*

²³¹ Anon., 'New Novels', *Graphic*, 7 December 1878, p. 579.

²³² Anon., 'The Return of the Native', *Saturday Review*, 4 January 1879, p. 23-24 (p. 23).

²³³ Anon., 'Novels of the Week', *Athenaeum*, 23 November 1878, pp. 654-55 (p. 654).

²³⁴ Penny Boumelha, "'Wild Regions of Obscurity': Narrative in *The Return of the Native*' in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 254-66 (p. 254).

Native's Wessex.²³⁵ As Angelique Richardson states, throughout his various works 'Hardy gives us scientific images and explanations', adding that 'he also gives us windows into the supernatural; onto magical worlds in which powers of the mind, of dreams and fantasies overpower reason'.²³⁶ Yet science, or more specifically technology, is still an underlying presence in *The Return of the Native*. For example, Eustacia compares Wildeve's ability to switch his affection between lovers to 'an electric light' (p. 67), and the suggestively demonic red appearance of the reddleman, Diggory Venn, is described as failing to induce fear among the country folk as the world is already 'filled by modern inventions' (p. 79); a changing world is confronted with new anxieties and fears involving technology. Moreover, references to the pseudo-science of mesmerism recur in the text, with the narrator noting how, after Eustacia fails to open the door of her home to Clym's mother, the broken-hearted Mrs. Yeobright 'spoke [...] as one in a mesmeric sleep' (p. 279). It is Mrs. Yeobright who is again linked to pseudo-science when Clym, in a state of despair following his estrangement from his mother, feels as though he could 'reach her by a magnetism which was as superior to words as words are to yells' (p. 188). Scattered references to pseudo-science pervade the narrative, emphasising how even the inhabitants of rural

²³⁵ See, for example, George Levine's 'Hardy and Darwin' and *Darwin and the Novelists*, Phillip Mallett's 'Hardy and the Nature of Nature', Gillian Beer's *Darwin's Plot*, Angelique Richardson's 'Hardy and Biology' or Adelene Buckland's 'Thomas Hardy, Provincial Geology, and the Material Imagination', *Thomas Hardy Journal*, n.s. 24 (Autumn 2008), pp. 44-60. Another excellent essay which explores the relationship between Darwinian theories and *The Return of the Native* is Gillian Beer's 'Can the Native Return?' in *The Return of the Native*, ed. Phillip Mallett (New York and London: Norton, 2006), pp. 504-24 which focuses on Captain Fitzroy's (later to become captain of *HMS Beagle* which took Darwin to the Galapagos islands) and his idea to kidnap a selection of Fuegians in 1830. Fitzroy then took them back to England, gave them a 'correct' education and then reintroduced them to Tierra del Fuego some years later. Beer links this incident to Hardy's own pursuit, albeit a very different one, of some form of anthropology in his fiction. Sinéad Garrigan Mattar's 'The Return of the Native: Animism, Fetishism, and the Enchanted Heath', *Thomas Hardy Journal*, n.s. 24 (Autumn 2008), pp. 4-22 also explores this topic, stating how '[t]hat Hardy had assimilated both the accreditation of "geological time" and the implications of Darwinism has been well established by now, but *The Return of the Native* shows that he also enjoyed making connections with the younger, cultural branch of evolutionary science, which found its first grand expression in Edward Tylor's 1871 study, *Primitive Culture*' (p. 5).

²³⁶ Richardson, 'Hardy and Science', p. 168.

Egdon Heath are aware of certain scientific aspects of the outside world, even if they are somehow removed from them. But *The Return of the Native* looks backwards instead of forwards: traditional rural customs and the ancient Heath itself dominate the narrative, suggesting that memories and relics of a past British culture are of greater importance than the geology which had characterised Hardy's earlier work, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*.²³⁷

The Return of the Native demonstrates Hardy's personal fascination with archaeology, which had come to inform his fiction: the past persistently intrudes upon the present.²³⁸ Dorset and its neighbouring south-west counties seem to have been favoured locations for various nineteenth-century archaeological excavations. Rebecca Welshman explains how, as early as 1803, 'William Cunnington excavated an early Bronze Age round barrow at Upton Lovell in Somerset' while further investigations at Gloucestershire's Belas Knap in 1863 uncovered various remains 'all bearing a strange similarity in the shape of their skulls, [which] led to the theory that a superior race of Bronze Age invaders had conquered Neolithic Britain'.²³⁹ Hardy seems to have taken an interest in such investigations, becoming a member of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club in 1881 and, according to Florence

²³⁷ An interesting article on Hardy's interest in the past is Shannon Rogers's 'Medievalism in the Last Novels of Thomas Hardy: New Wine in Old Bottles', *English Literature in Transition (1800-1920)*, n.s. 42:3 (1999), pp. 298-316 which focuses on the medieval elements of Hardy's fiction.

²³⁸ For a more detailed analysis of Hardy and archaeology see Harold Orel's 'Hardy and the Developing Science of Archaeology', *Thomas Hardy Annual*, n.s. 4 (1986), pp. 19-44, Josephine Pentney's 'Archaeology and Thomas Hardy', *Thomas Hardy Journal*, n.s. 4 (1988), pp. 17-18 or Rebecca Welshman's 'Imagining Archaeology: Hardy and the Bronze Age', *Thomas Hardy Journal*, n.s. 32 (Autumn 2008), pp. 34-43. Another interesting work published by Charles Warne, a contemporary of Hardy, is *Ancient Dorset: The Celtic, Roman, Saxon and Danish Antiquities of the County, including the Early Coinage. Also an Introduction to the Ethnology of Dorset, and Other Archaeological Notices of the County by William Wake Smart* (Bournemouth: D. Sydenham, 1872). For analysis on the history of archaeology see Bruce G. Trigger's *A History of Archaeological Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

²³⁹ Welshman, 'Imagining Archaeology', p. 34.

Hardy, even discovered a 5,000 year old Roman stone in his garden and subsequently 'erected what he called The Druid Stone' on the lawn at Max Gate in 1891 after it had lain hidden in the Dorset countryside 'for perhaps two thousand years'.²⁴⁰ *The Return of the Native*'s reference to a 'very curious Druidical stone' (p. 185), 'arrow-heads used by the old tribes on Egdon' (p. 330) and the Blackbarrow,²⁴¹ which was 'thrown up by the ancient British people' (p. 83), seem to allude to Hardy's interest in archaeology, ancient cultures and landscapes: as Ralph Pite observes, '[p]lace is [...] of great importance in Hardy's fiction [...]. *The Return of the Native* epitomises the emphasis [...] on particular geographies and the influence they wield over their inhabitants'.²⁴² The heath itself holds the key to an older, non-Christian past. Described as a figure of 'watchful intentness', its 'Titanic form' (p. 10) controls Eustacia's 'Persephone-like entrapment and informs the narrative through archaeological investigation by both concealing and revealing relics'.²⁴³ For example, 'the shaping of Clym's destiny' occurs when a 'barrow was opened on the heath, and

²⁴⁰ Florence Hardy, *Life*, pp. 233-34. For further analysis on the Romano-British relics found at Max Gate see Stephen Mottram's 'Hardy, Max Gate and Stonehenge', *Thomas Hardy Fellowship Newsletter*, n.s. 24 (Winter 2008), pp. 11-14 and Andrew Radford's 'Excavating an Empire of Dust in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*', *Thomas Hardy Journal*, n.s. 25 (Autumn 2009), pp. 48-105. Angelique Richardson in 'Hardy and Science' also notes how he 'worked closely with the archaeologist General Augustus Pitt-Rivers on the digs at Max Gate' (p. 163) while Ruth A. Firor's 'Folkways in Thomas Hardy' in *Thomas Hardy Family History*, ed. Norman Page (London: Routledge, 1998), V, pp. 1-357 discusses Hardy's "Druid Stone" before explaining how 'not far from Max Gate were found two skeletons, clasped in each other's arms, in a barrow pronounced as least as old as 1800 BC' (p. 268). Firor's work is still the standard work on folklore in Thomas Hardy's fiction.

²⁴¹ Slade in 'Notes' in *The Return* observes that 'Hardy altered all references in the novel from Blackbarrow to Rainbarrow from 1895. Having grown up near the actual Rainbarrow(s), to the East of Dorchester, Hardy knew that this is a group of three, and he mentions the barrow(s) as such in *The Dynasts*' (p. 399).

²⁴² Ralph Pite, *Hardy's Geography: Wessex and the Regional Novel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 1. For a further analysis of Hardy's regionalisation see W. J. Keith's 'A Regional Approach to Hardy's Fiction' in *Critical Approaches to the Fiction of Thomas Hardy*, ed. Dale Kramer (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1979), pp. 36-49.

²⁴³ *The Return of the Native* often seems to link Eustacia Vye's entrapment on Egdon Heath to this legend of Greek mythology. Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter who was abducted by Hades and imprisoned in the Lower World so that she could be his queen. Eventually Hades agreed to release Persephone but the fact that she had eaten the forbidden pomegranate fruit bound her to the Lower World for part of the year. For more information see Abraham H. Lass, David Kiremidjian, Ruth M. Goldstein, *Dictionary of Classical and Literary Allusion* (Ware: Wordsworth, 1994).

[he] [...] attended the operation' (p. 188). When his mother asks Christian Cantle, a local man, about her son's whereabouts, Cantle observes that:

They have dug a hole, and they found things like flower-pots upside down [...] and inside these be real charnel bones. [...] I shouldn't like to sleep where they abide. Dead folks have been known to come and claim their own. Mr. Yeobright had got one pot of the bones, and was going to bring 'em home – real skellington bones – but [...] he gave away his [...] [t]o Miss Vye. She has a cannibal taste for such churchyard furniture. (p. 189)

Archaeology is also connected with Eustacia's melancholic interest in death, and a strange sense of an irrevocably lost past haunts the text. While the mystery surrounding the Barrow's treasured bones evokes images of pagan people, decay and destruction, it is Eustacia's 'cannibal taste' for ancient grave relics that unnerves the reader: her dark and often morbid portrayal insidiously and insistently disrupts the narrative.

This unnerving aspect of Eustacia's characterisation is particularly significant in light of the additional dimension that is implicit throughout *The Return of the Native*: female unconventionality is, as in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, linked to the rural fear of witchcraft. Placed in context, Hardy's own delight 'in the ballads of the Wessex country'²⁴⁴ is significant when, as F. B. Pinion notes, with reference to *The Return of the Native*, that 'stories of witchcraft [...] (still lingering in Wessex when the novel was written) [...] contributed in some measure to the enrichment of the story'.²⁴⁵ On a similar note, Peter Robson observes how 'witchcraft belief was indeed still alive in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hardy [...] would have

²⁴⁴ James F. Scott, 'Hardy's use of the Gothic: An Examination of Five Representative Works', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, n.s. 17:4 (March 1963), pp. 363-80 (p. 367).

²⁴⁵ F. B. Pinion, *A Hardy Companion: A Guide to the Works of Thomas Hardy and their Background* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1968), p. 31.

had ample opportunity to observe the phenomena at first hand'.²⁴⁶ Additionally, Hardy's own "*Facts*" *Notebook*, which he began in 1883, recollects how the daughter of a 'well known Somerset conjurer [...] affects to cure [...] [the] lame [...] by a charm – [and] counteract effects of witchcraft'.²⁴⁷ Similarly, Emma Hardy's *Some Recollections* – which was edited and posthumously published by her grieving husband – documents her own rural upbringing, explaining how it was a world 'where belief in witchcraft was carried out in actual practice amongst the primitive inhabitants [...] our neighbours beyond the hamlets were nine miles off'.²⁴⁸ There is a suggestion, then, that isolated communities retain superstitious beliefs in conjunction with religion: as with the archaeological references which frame *The Return of the Native*, Hardy's interest in witchcraft suggests a nostalgia for the rural past.

The mid-Victorian period saw a widespread revival in witchcraft narratives and an intense interest in its complex history.²⁴⁹ The traditionally realist Elizabeth Gaskell built upon her love of ghost stories – famously accusing Charles Dickens of having "'stolen" one of her favourite[s]' when he ventured into the genre²⁵⁰ – when she published 'Lois the Witch' in *All the Year Round* in 1859, using the Salem witch-

²⁴⁶ Peter Robson, 'Thomas Hardy's Conjurors', *Hardy Society Journal*, n.s. 6:1 (Spring 2010), pp. 48-57 (p. 48).

²⁴⁷ Hardy, Thomas, *Thomas Hardy's "Facts" Notebook* ed. William Greenslade (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), p. 101.

²⁴⁸ Emma Hardy, *Some Recollections*, eds. Evelyn Hardy and Robert Gittings (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp. 46-47.

²⁴⁹ For more information on non-British nineteenth-century witchcraft cases see, for example, Wolfgang Behringer's *Witches and Witch-Hunts: A Global History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and Éva Pócs's 'Curse, Maleficium, Divination: Witchcraft on the Boarderline of Religion and Magic' in *Witchcraft Continued: Popular Magic in Modern Europe*, eds. Willem de Blécourt and Owen Davies, pp. 174-90.

²⁵⁰ Jenny Uglow, 'Foreword' in *Lois the Witch* (London: Hesperus, 2003), pp. vii-xi (p. vii). For further information on Gaskell see Vanessa D. Dickerson's *Victorian Ghosts in the Noontide* and Louise Henson's "'Half Believing, Half Incredulous": Elizabeth Gaskell, Superstition and the Victorian Mind', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, n.s. 24:3 (2002), pp. 251-69.

craze as a backdrop.²⁵¹ Previously, moreover, Lucie Duff-Gordon's 1846 translation of *Mary Schweidler: The Amber Witch*, Catherine Crowe's 'Possessed by Demons' in *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) and Eliza Lynn Linton's *Witch Stories* (1861), all emerged in the mid-Victorian period.²⁵² But it was not just in fiction that the subject of witchcraft gained popularity: as Susan Hoyle notes, '[t]he best source for the study of Victorian witchcraft is newspapers' and the periodical literature of the period.²⁵³ *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal* published 'A Modern Witch-Finder', and lamented that 'ignorance and credulity are still too abundant in the country';²⁵⁴ *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* published a detailed account of Johannes Wilhelm Meinhold, author of the *Amber Witch*,²⁵⁵ while *Punch* printed a satirical poem entitled 'The Revival of Witchcraft'.²⁵⁶ Charles Dickens's *Household Words* also embraced the debate in 1857, commenting on *The Times*'s claim that 'belief in witchcraft still prevails amongst the rural population of England'²⁵⁷ and, in the same year, drew further parallels between the 'mild witchcraft' of alchemy and the preparation of perfumes.²⁵⁸ Dickens's periodical, later re-titled *All the Year Round*, foregrounded similar themes, looking to past cultures and suggesting that '[a]ncient magic was

²⁵¹ While the witch persecutions had declined in Europe around 1700, as a result of the Age of Enlightenment, one of the last outbreaks of witch-hunting occurred in 1692 in Salem, Massachusetts. An irrational chain of events, which resulted in the death of twenty villagers, started after a group of young girls were found playing at magic. When it was supposed that they were bewitched a subsequent witch-hunt occurred that soon turned into mass hysteria as personal and religious differences between members of the community exacerbated the event. For more information see Bernard Rosenthal's *Salem Story: Reading the Witch Trials of 1692* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²⁵² A vast collection of mid-Victorian factual and fictional stories of witchcraft have been collected together in the twentieth-century publication of *A Circle of Witches: An Anthology of Victorian Witchcraft Stories*, ed. Peter Haining (London: Robert Hale, 1971).

²⁵³ Susan Hoyle, 'The Witch and the Detective: Mid-Victorian Stories and Beliefs' in *Witchcraft Continued*, pp. 46-68 (p. 47).

²⁵⁴ Anon., 'A Modern Witch-Finder', *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, April 1841, n.s. 482, pp. 111-21 (p. 111).

²⁵⁵ Anon., 'The Convent Witch', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, n.s. 38:226 (October 1848), pp. 365-78.

²⁵⁶ Anon., 'The Revival of Witchcraft', *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 18 April 1857, p. 159.

²⁵⁷ Anon., 'Witchcraft and old Bogy', *Household Words*, 30 May 1857, pp. 505-11 (p. 505).

²⁵⁸ Anon., 'Perfumes', *Household Words*, 7 March 1857, pp. 236-40 (p. 236).

ancient science'.²⁵⁹ In 1869, *All the Year Round* reported that a 'recent [English] trial for witchcraft [...] suggests the unpleasant reflection that the belief in witches still exists'.²⁶⁰ Mid-Victorian society, therefore, seems to have had a keen interest in various forms of ancient magical practices and their contemporary use. For Thomas Hardy, this fascination is clearly apparent in *The Return of the Native*, particularly in its description of the unpredictable heroine Eustacia Vye.

Eustacia is openly associated with witchcraft. Positioned both literally and figuratively outside society, she is depicted as a 'singularly' haunting presence, who vanishes 'at the approach of strangers' (p. 55) and who furtively uses a telescope to gaze upon others. Using darkness as a cloak to mask her movements and intentions, Eustacia is, as the narrator notes, Egdon Heath's 'Queen of Night' (p. 68). The narrative relentlessly reiterates her 'magic reputation' (p. 184) and supernatural affiliation. Described as a 'lonesome dark-eyed creature [...] that some say is a witch' (p. 52), Eustacia is unable, and suggestively unwilling, to escape such allusions. Mrs Yeobright, Christian Cantle and even Clym – who, in the aftermath of their marriage breakdown, warns his wife not to 'bewitch me again' (p. 321) – use the discourse of witchcraft to make sense of her unconventional behaviour.²⁶¹ While this

²⁵⁹ Anon., 'Magic and Science', *All the Year Round*, 23 March 1861, pp. 561-66 (p. 561).

²⁶⁰ Anon., 'Witchcraft in the Nineteenth Century', *All the Year Round*, 6 November 1869, pp. 541-44 (p. 541). The newspaper articles discussed in this thesis are only a sample of the many witchcraft-focused articles which filled the pages of numerous mid-Victorian periodicals. For further information see Maureen F. Moran's "'Light No Smithfield Fires": Some Victorian Attitudes to Witchcraft', *Journal of Popular Culture*, n.s. 33:4 (Spring 2000), pp. 123-51.

²⁶¹ Another notable occasion when Eustacia is referred to as a witch is when the young Johnny Nunsuch – Eustacia's household helper – believes that his mistress has 'charmed 'em [hopfrogs] to come' (p. 78). Moreover, when Clym first inquires about Eustacia his mother replies that '[p]eople say she's a witch, but of course that's absurd' (p. 163) before later back-tracking, stating that '[g]ood girls don't get treated as witches even on Egdon' (p. 178). Eustacia also realises her tainted reputation, confessing to Clym that 'I am not a good girl, and the witch story will be added to make me blacker' (p. 205). For further information on Dorset witchcraft see, for example, John Symonds Udall's *Dorsetshire Folklore* (St. Peter Port: Toucan, 1970) and Gayla R. Steel's *Sexual Tyranny in Wessex*:

representation could, in part, be explained by her failure to integrate into Egdon society, the real difficulty emerges when Eustacia draws parallels between dark magic and her own desire for empowerment over love.

This is most apparent in her ill-fated relationship with Damon Wildeve. Using a bonfire as a visual command, her power over him is intensified with the flames: as his name suggests – Damon is similar to the word demon – he is subservient to her commands, admitting that ‘I have come in obedience to your call’ (p. 66). If Wildeve is positioned as a familiar,²⁶² then Eustacia fulfils the role of the witch, significantly boasting that ‘I merely lit the fire because I was dull, and thought I would get a little excitement by [...] triumphing over you as the Witch of Endor called up Samuel. [...] I have shown my power’ (p. 66). As had Eliot in *The Mill on the Floss*, Hardy also emphasises the apparent links between Christianity and witchcraft, manipulating the biblical narrative of Saul – the King of Israel who forced the Witch of Endor to conjure up the spirit of the prophet Samuel who predicted the King’s death²⁶³ – to suggest Eustacia’s supernatural aspects. But what makes her magical powers and self-imposed geographical and social isolation truly unsettling is Eustacia’s lack of religious adherence and rejection of Christian custom. For example, she ignores the eighth Commandment in failing to keep the Sabbath day holy as ‘[s]he only valued

Hardy’s Witches and the Demons of Folklore (New York: Lang, 1993). It is also interesting that a number of nineteenth-century witchcraft artefacts from Dorset are currently held in ‘The Museum of Witchcraft’ in Boscastle, Cornwall.

²⁶² A witch’s familiar was, as David Pickering in *Dictionary of Witchcraft* states, a ‘demon or imp, usually in the outward form of an animal, that was assigned to a witch or sorcerer to carry out magic on their command’, p. 182.

²⁶³ ‘Old Testament’, *English Bible*, p. 230. For more information on the treatment of witchcraft in the Bible see, for example, Montague Summers’s *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* (London: Kegan Paul, 1926) which states that ‘[t]hroughout the whole of the Old Testament the sin of Necromancy is condemned in the strongest terms’ (p. 181). Reverend. J. B. Clifford in *Modern Witchcraft, or, Spiritualism; A Sign of the Times* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1873) discusses ‘some of the cases given in the Bible, of witchcraft or Spiritualism’ such as ‘[t]he unhappy king Saul’ who succeeded in using ‘a witch at Endor’, p. 9.

rest to herself when it came in the midst of other people's labour. Hence she hated Sundays' (p. 72), and briefly contemplates attending a church service merely 'in hope of seeing him [Clym] there' (p. 121).²⁶⁴ Importantly, on the single occasion that Eustacia does attend church she is physically attacked by a superstitious neighbour, Susan Nunsuch, who believes her to be a malevolent witch and desperately attempts to put an end to her bewitching. As Christian Cantle relates, 'Susan Nunsuch [...] had threatened to do as soon as ever she could get the young lady to church, where she don't come very often. She've waited for this chance for weeks' (p. 176). In addition to her anti-Christian 'cannibal taste for [...] churchyard furniture' (p. 189), Eustacia seems to embody many anxieties of Victorian society: the renewed interest in witchcraft and evidence of a weakening religious faith are openly apparent in Eustacia's portrayal, suggesting that, despite Hardy's insistence on positioning the narrative in the past – set in the 1840s although it is published in 1878 – the text responds to the concerns of its mid- to late-Victorian audience.

For much of *Return of the Native*, witchcraft imagery is predominantly associated with Eustacia Vye.²⁶⁵ On a more subtle level, however, the discourse of sorcery is applied to other minor characters, particularly in Hardy's presentation of the village fool, Christian Cantle: as in the crucial casino scene of *Daniel Deronda*,

²⁶⁴ The Ten Commandments, or Decalogue, are ten laws given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai and documented in the Bible. The eighth Commandment states that all Christians must 'Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy' (see 'Old Testament', *English Bible*, p. 153).

²⁶⁵ Diggory Venn is another notable figure whose reddish appearance is frequently depicted in supernatural or demonic imagery. He is referred to as 'a red ghost' (p. 77), a 'spectral' (p. 79) visitor and linked to 'Mephistopheles' (p. 147), the demonic tormentor of Faust. At the close of the narrative when his dyed-red skin returns to normal he is called a 'ghost of yourself' (p. 374) before Thomasin claims that "'I can't believe that he had got white of his own accord. It seemed supernatural'" (p. 374). While the focus of this thesis is directed towards the topic of witchcraft in relation to Eustacia Vye, Rosemarie Morgan's 'Conflicting Courses' focuses on Venn's 'malevolent underside' (p. 482).

the rhetoric of magic is associated with gambling.²⁶⁶ Indeed, it is Cantle's fear of the supernatural and the ghostly haunting which positions him as an object of ridicule amongst his neighbours, while his conduct during the raffle in the Quiet Woman Inn demonstrates his superstitious irrationality. He justifies his gambling by declaring that his luck is almost certainly guaranteed as he was 'born wi'a caul' (p. 218) before reassuring himself that there is 'no black art' (p. 217) in a raffle.²⁶⁷ But later events hint at supernatural forces: what Cantle terms as his general 'good luck' takes on a darker aspect. As his fortune increases, his fixation with the dice deepens: the impressionable young man refers to the dice as 'magical machines' (p. 221) before passionately declaring that they have a 'charm, and such a spell, and such power in 'em... [it] passes all I ever heard or seed.' (p. 221). Significantly, the objects of Cantle's 'fascinated gaze' (p. 221) become an obsession. As he begs to keep the wooden dice, he seems trapped by their apparently supernatural power, marvelling at their influence before asking if they 'be the devil's plaything' (p. 222). At one level this is all just harmless fun – the narrator seems to be mocking as well as emphasising the dangers of a gambling addiction. But there is always a sinister undertone. Even

²⁶⁶ The issue of gambling and the way it influences Hardy's fiction has been overlooked in recent criticism with the notable exception of Michael Flavin's excellent article 'Will Dare, *A Laodicean* and Thomas Hardy's Gamblers', *Thomas Hardy Journal*, n.s. 17: 3 (Spring 2001), pp. 68-78. Flavin points out that 'Thomas Hardy knew practically nothing about gambling' (p. 68) but goes on to discuss how 'as early as 1866, in the poem 'Hap', Hardy wrote "dicing Time for gladness casts a moan"'. What is significant then is that Hardy knew enough about gambling to use it in his writings. Moreover, the Victorian age witnessed something of a love-hate relationship with gaming which is reflected in the literature and art of the period. For example, Robert Braithwaite Martineau's 1862 narrative painting *The Last Day in the Old Home* offers an influential visual commentary on the evils of gambling while Charles Dickens's 1841 *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and Anthony Trollope's 1861 *Framley Parsonage* also focus on the effects of gaming. There is a sense, therefore, that despite legislation such as the 1845 Gambling Act, gaming was still a concern for Victorian society and is an issue which is also a focus in Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*.

²⁶⁷ In Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* (London: Penguin, 2004), David states that 'I was born with a caul, which was advertised for sale, in the newspapers, at the low price of fifteen guineas', p. 13. A caul is the foetal membrane which covered the baby's head at birth and, if not removed, could suffocate the child. A caul was thought to provide good luck and often sold as a charm.

though this is 'just' a game of dice combined with rural superstitions, the association of the paranormal and gambling is never completely innocent.²⁶⁸

Although Cantle's magical dice and Eustacia's juxtaposition with the Witch of Endor are direct allusions to the world of witchcraft, importantly it is the narrative form, as opposed to any action, which creates these supernatural parallels: neither Cantle nor Eustacia actually resort to the practice of witchcraft. Arguably, the 'real' witch of *The Return of the Native* is not Eustacia but the superstitious rural villager Susan Nunsuch, who believes that Eustacia has bewitched her son and actually uses witchcraft to counteract what she perceives to be Eusatacia's act of bewitchment. Initially, this emerges as a direct assault upon the body of the suspected witch: 'Susan [...] pricked Miss Vye with a long stocking-needle [...] so as to draw her blood and put an end to the bewitching [...] she followed her [Eustacia] into church' (p. 176). Pricking was a torture used to draw the blood of a witch to break her spell and subsequently cure anyone she had cursed.²⁶⁹ Significantly, then, Susan resorts to an aggressive, non-Christian form of counter-bewitchment in a Christian place of worship, which becomes the location of a premeditated witch-hunt. As the novel progresses, moreover, and the health of Johnny Nunsuch, Susan's son, continues to

²⁶⁸ Although there are numerous references to rural superstitions in *The Return of the Native* – the 'ancient remedy' (p. 296) of using adder fat on a snake bite, Christian Cantle's femininity blamed upon the 'no moon' (p. 29) on his birth day, and even the rational Mrs Yeobright's who doesn't 'believe in the old superstitions' decides to throw 'a slipper' (p. 158) on Thomasin's wedding day to aid good luck – I am going to limit my analysis of superstition to 'The Withered Arm' in the next section of this Chapter.

²⁶⁹ The practice of pricking is discussed by Robbins, *Encyclopaedia of Witchcraft*, p. 475. It was believed that after releasing the blood of a witch her familiar, who was helping in her bewitchment, would leave the victim to come and feed from his mistress's blood. The spell would be broken and the guilt of the witch would be secured by the recovery of her victim.

deteriorate, so his mother's anger against Eustacia intensifies. After crafting a waxen effigy²⁷⁰ of Eustacia:

Susan held the object at arm's length and contemplated it with [...] satisfaction [...] From her workbasket in the window-seat the woman took a paper of pins [...] [and] began to thrust into the image in all directions, with apparently excruciating energy. Probably as many as fifty were thus inserted [...] til the figure was completely permeated with pins. [...] she held it in the heat, and watched it as it began to waste slowly away. And while she stood thus engaged there came from between her lips a murmur of words. It was a strange jargon – the Lord's Prayer repeated backwards – the incantation usual in proceedings for obtaining unhallowed assistance against an enemy. (p. 348)

In contrast to Maggie Tulliver's fetishisation of her toy doll, Susan Nunsuch carefully creates her fetish doll and gives it a specific identity in a desperate attempt to use sympathetic magic. But while the woman's mutilation of the waxen figure is a disturbing practice, even in a rural mid-Victorian context, it is Susan's abuse of Christianity to gain 'unhallowed assistance' (p. 348) that is most unsettling. The Lord's Prayer is inverted, distorted and used to gain non-Christian power: a demonic element invades the narrative. Susan's use of the black art locates her as a member of a dark non-Christian or Pagan sorority.²⁷¹ Although Eustacia's subsequent death by drowning seems evidence of the malign power of Susan's counter-bewitchment, there is a twist. In the context of witchcraft, as David Pickering explains, 'casting a suspected witch [...] into a pond, pool or river to see if she floated (in which case she was guilty) or sank (in which case she was innocent, but risked being drowned

²⁷⁰ For further information on Hardy's treatment of the effigy in his other works, especially *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, see Julian Wolfreys 'The Haunted Structures of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*' in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 299-312.

²⁷¹ For further information on the Christian belief in the power of prayer see Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic* who states that '[p]rayer was [...] employed as a means of divination, that is to say of seeking supernatural guidance', p. 117. It is also interesting that I. D. McCalman's 'Popular Irreligion in early Victorian England: Infidel Preachers and Radical Theatricality in 1830s London' in *Religion and Society: Essays in Honor of R.K. Webb*, eds. R.W. Davies and R.J. Helmstadter (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 51-67 states that 'muttering the Lord's Prayer backwards [is] in accordance with English folk superstition' (p. 55) as a means of summoning the Devil.

anyway)',²⁷² so Susan's act in effect proves Eustacia's innocence. As in Eliot's protagonist, Maggie, in *The Mill on the Floss*, there is a sense that Eustacia's witch-like presentation is based upon other people's perceptions of her social transgression and unusual behaviour: the discourse of witchcraft is used to articulate Eustacia's unconventional femininity. Indeed, the true witch of *The Return of the Native* is the paganistic and malevolent Susan Nunsuch.

Eustacia's association with witchcraft, therefore, proves to be nothing other than rural gossip. Nevertheless, there is still an unsettling aspect of her presentation. I suggest that her witchly aspect is often confused with her unconventional pagan elements. As Maureen F. Moran observes, '[s]erious anthropological and historical studies, such as those by James Frazer [...] link witchcraft to the survival of pagan religious belief and practice'.²⁷³ Paganism is everywhere in Thomas Hardy's fiction – from the name of Sir Pagan d'Urberville, to Tess's capture at the polytheist monument of Stonehenge in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure*'s preoccupation with a more Classical pagan past – but nowhere is the protagonist more enveloped in a non-Christian environment than in *The Return of the Native*.²⁷⁴ Indeed, in the context of exploring the pagan aspects of the novel, even the title of the book is suggestive of a return to native British, pre-Christian religious beliefs. Moreover, with

²⁷² Pickering, *Dictionary of Witchcraft*, pp. 466-67.

²⁷³ Moran, "'Light No Smithfield Fires'", p. 123. James Frazer's *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890) was a prolific anthropological study of the beliefs of mankind through magic and religion to scientific thought. Although there is not enough space in this thesis to explore the influence and reception of Frazer's work in any depth, it is significant that it focuses upon pre-Christian and pagan religious beliefs in Britain.

²⁷⁴ For further information on Hardy's use of paganism see, for example, Jeremy V. Steele's 'Plato and the Love Goddess: Paganism in Two Versions of *The Well-Beloved*' in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 199-218, Dennis Taylor's 'Jude the Obscure and English National Identity'; Shirley A. Stave's *The Decline of the Goddess: Nature, Culture and Women in Thomas Hardy's Fiction* (London: Greenwood Press, 1995); Charlotte Bonica's 'Nature and Paganism in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', *ELH*, n.s. 49:4 (Winter 1982), pp. 849-62.

regard to the text, the Egdon Heath bonfires symbolise how the rural community has 'suddenly dived into past ages and fetched [...] ashes of the original British pyre' emphasising how 'such blazes [...] are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than from [...] [the] Gunpowder Plot' (p. 20). Coinciding with Thomas Hardy's self-proclaimed interest in archaeology, therefore, is an equally apparent curiosity in ancient cultural rites: pre-Christian Celtic winter rituals dominate the text as a pagan past insinuates itself into a Christian present. More specifically, Eustacia Vye's controversial cross-dressing as the heathen Turkish Knight in the Christmas mummers' play²⁷⁵ overtly places her in an anti-Christian context, negating the religious elements of the festivities in favour of an older, darker paganism connected to the winter solstice.²⁷⁶ The woman's 'Pagan eyes, full of nocturnal mysteries' (p. 68) are transformed as she allows herself 'to be changed in sex, brilliant in clothes, and armed from top to toe' (p. 128). Yet, Eustacia Vye is not the sole representation of pre-Christian beliefs. Repeatedly, the people of Egdon Heath embrace various forms of paganism: the country dance, which provides the

²⁷⁵ As Patricia Ingham in 'Notes' in *The Return of the Native* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 397-428 explains, mummers 'are local youths who perform a traditional Christmas folk-drama which, probably having developed out of pagan festivals marking the winter solstice, came to be given a Christian veneer along with items of topical and local relevance' (p. 413). However, Hardy's knowledge of the primitive source of the mummer's play is a subject of debate. While Ruth A. Firor in 'Folkways' (pp. 202-03), James Gindin in 'Hardy and Folklore' in *The Return of the Native: An Authoritative Text, Background, Criticism* (New York: Norton, 1969), pp. 396-401 and John Paterson in 'The Return of the Native as Anti-Christian Document', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, n.s. 14:2 (September 1959), pp. 111-27 all base their readings of the mummer's play in *The Return of the Native* on Hardy's knowledge of its pagan origins, Robert Squillace's 'Hardy's Mummers', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, n.s. 41:2 (September 1986), pp. 172-89 challenges these readings, arguing that 'for Hardy such rituals represented an earlier stage in human development no longer accessible to contemporary man' (p. 172). This thesis will focus on the play's original pagan ritual, arguing that even if Hardy's knowledge of its origins are contentious, he nevertheless still places Eustacia as the play's pagan Turkish Knight: Eustacia is distanced from any Christian elements of the mummer's play. For a more general analysis of paganism see, for example, R. H. Hutton's *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles: Their Nature and Legacy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

²⁷⁶ The winter solstice takes place on 22 December and is a marker of when the sun is at its southernmost point. The word solstice derives from the Latin *sol* (sun) and *sistere* (stand still). *The Return of the Native* refers to the winter solstice on a number of occasions. For example, just prior to Clym's return to Egdon, the narrative states that 'it was a fine afternoon [...] but the winter solstice having stealthily come on, the lowness of the sun caused the hour to seem later than it actually was, there being little here to remind an inhabitant that he must unlearn his summer experience of the sky as a dial' (p. 107).

married Eustacia with the opportunity to meet Wildeve, is described as a moment when 'Paganism was revived in their hearts' (p. 254), while the narrative carefully closes with yet another polytheist maypole ritual, describing how 'the impulses of all such outlandish hamlets are pagan still' as 'homage to nature, self-adoration, frantic gaieties, fragments of Teutonic rites to divinities whose names are forgotten, have in some way or other survived mediaeval doctrine' (p. 376).²⁷⁷ As in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, when Tess dresses in white during the pre-Christian May-time festivities²⁷⁸, in *The Return of the Native*, the emphasis is on a Celtic idolisation of and respect for nature: as John Paterson notes, the regeneration 'of life following the deaths of Eustacia and Wildeve is symbolized in the ancient rite of Maypole-day with its celebration of a vitality older and stronger than [...] Christianity'.²⁷⁹ A different type of worship is evident in *The Return of the Native*: coinciding with Hardy's own diminishing Christian faith, his narratives evoke a pre-Christian past and pantheism insidiously but insistently disrupts the romance of the text.

Thomas Hardy's Wessex is replete with allusions to heathen deities. What the narrative terms as 'the fettered gods of the earth' (p. 21) trouble *The Return of the Native*, creating an atmosphere where pagan nature worship is paramount: as Gayla R. Steel notes, '[m]assive glowering Egdon Heath accumulates power by the narrator's allusions to the old gods'.²⁸⁰ Moreover, Eustacia's entrapment in Egdon is described in distinctly pre-Christian terms. Just as Jude feels a sense of powerlessness over his

²⁷⁷ Maypole Day usually takes place on 1 May and consists of dancing around a wooden may pole. The pole is often interpreted as a phallic object in a fertility ritual which, as Shirley A. Stave in *The Decline of the Goddess* notes, is described as 'a Pagan celebration of the act of sex' (p. 58). For further information on Maypoling in Thomas Hardy's fiction see Firor's 'Folkways'.

²⁷⁸ Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 13.

²⁷⁹ Paterson, 'Return of the Native as Anti-Christian', p. 122.

²⁸⁰ Steel, *Hardy's Witches*, p. 49.

Classical learning in *Jude the Obscure*, so too Eustacia is held captive by the divinities of the ancient Greek world: 'Egdon was her Hades, and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark [...] A true Tartarean dignity sat upon her brow' (p. 69).²⁸¹ Death, shadows and suffering characterise her presentation but it is the mythological vocabulary which is most significant: the text's often contradictory presentation of Eustacia is only consistent in its use of ancient pre-Christian imagery. For example, Eustacia's gloomy 'Tartarean dignity' is inverted as the narrator foregrounds how 'her general figure might have stood for [...] either of the higher female deities' as she strikes 'the note of Artemis, Athena, or Hera' (p. 69).²⁸² Contained within an ancient Greek framework, Eustacia Vye is the fallen goddess, imprisoned in a hellish existence on Egdon Heath. The community's ritualistic bonfires, May Day dancing, lack of churchgoing and passion for mumming imply that Eustacia is not alone in her apparent kinship with multiple gods: rural Wessex looks away from Christianity towards the pantheistic religions of ancient civilisations.

Placed in the context of Hardy's own loss of belief, moreover, it seems that in searching for something to replace Christian faith, he looks backwards to the pagan worship of the natural world, moving away from biblical miracles and back into the countryside rituals of his Dorset youth. Simultaneously there is an anti-Christian movement which will end in the controversial publication of *Jude the Obscure* in 1895 and the breakdown of his marriage to Emma. Hardy's love of nature and

²⁸¹ For a more detailed analysis of the mythological imagery in Hardy's fiction see J. B. Bullen's 'The God's in Wessex Exile: Thomas Hardy and Mythology' in *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. J. B. Bullen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), pp. 181-98 which focuses on Hardy's 'complex of allusions and parallels with mythological archetypes' (p. 181).

²⁸² Tartarus is part of the underworld in Greek mythology while Artemis, Athena and Hera are all Greek goddesses: Artemis is the virgin goddess of the hunt, Athena is the battle goddess while Hera is the sister and wife of Zeus whose role was as the protector of marriage. For more information see Lass, Kiremidjian, Goldstein, *Dictionary of Classical and Literary Allusion*.

relocation away from the busy London literary scene in his later life is reflected in his fictional worlds. In the last section of this chapter I focus upon Hardy's Wessex short story, 'The Withered Arm' (1888) which, in its almost complete absence of religious belief, suggests that in the period prior to *Jude the Obscure*, Hardy was already moving away from any form of systematic worship – whether the pantheistic paganism which dominates *The Return of the Native* or the Christian orthodoxy which is famously condemned in the Classical/Christian conflict of *Jude* – towards a world reliant on and subsumed by the irrational threat of rural superstition.

(iii)

Published collectively as *Wessex Tales* in 1888, Hardy's anthology of short stories was his first work to use the word 'Wessex' in the title and to focus almost entirely on rural life in Dorset.²⁸³ Kristin Brady explains, '[m]uch of the traditional material in *Wessex Tales* is, in fact, an amalgam of written and oral sources'.²⁸⁴ Regardless of the industrial and scientific advancements of the 1880s, therefore, Hardy chose instead to explore the country folklore and superstitions of his childhood.²⁸⁵ As Kathryn R. King discusses, the 'eighties saw the world's first roller-coaster, the first skyscraper, the first fully automatic machine-gun [...] and in Vienna a man named Josef Breuer

²⁸³ The May 1888 publication of *Wessex Tales: Strange, Lively, and Commonplace* consisted of five short stories: 'The Three Strangers' (1883), 'The Withered Arm' (1888), 'Fellow Townsman' (1880), 'Interlopers at the Knap' (1884) and 'The Distracted Preacher' (1879). However, this thesis will only focus on 'the Withered Arm' (1888). Although there is not a great deal of criticism on Hardy's short stories, for further information see, for example, Alexander Fischler's 'Theatrical Techniques in Thomas Hardy's Short Stories', *Studies in Short Fiction*, n.s. 3 (1966), pp. 435-45; Norman Page's chapter on Hardy's short fiction in *Thomas Hardy* (London: Routledge, 1977); Harold Orel's *The Victorian Short Story* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

²⁸⁴ Kristin Brady, *The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy: Tales of Past and Present* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1982), p. 3.

²⁸⁵ As Gillian Bennett in *Traditions of Belief* notes, '[t]he term "folklore" was originally coined by W. J. Thoms in a letter to the influential journal the *Athenaeum* [...] in August 1846. The name may have been new, but the study was well-established' (p.1). Bennett also explores The Folklore Society and what she terms as 'the folklorist work of 1840 to 1920' (p. 90).

pioneered psychoanalysis'²⁸⁶ but Hardy turned his face against such changes, choosing the nostalgia of his own rural past. This is perhaps most apparent in the macabre short story, 'The Withered Arm', published in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in January 1888 after, as Peter Widdowson notes, it had been 'rejected by C. J. Longman as much too grim and unrelieved'.²⁸⁷ Set between the years 1818 and 1825, the narrative, though short in length, is packed with allusions to Dorset superstitions and customs.

The tale is concerned with Rhoda Brook – an outcast dairymaid whose illicit affair with her landowning employer, Farmer Lodge, has left her with an illegitimate son. When Farmer Lodge subsequently returns home with his young and beautiful bride, Gertrude, Rhoda is consumed by jealousy. Her envy unexpectedly culminates in a strange dream in which Gertrude enters Rhoda's bedchamber as an incubus. Panicked by this spectral vision, Rhoda lashes out, grasping the incubus by the left hand before waking up in horror. The next day, when Rhoda meets the real Gertrude, the appearance of her wounded left arm dismays Rhoda but, in spite of her initial dislike for Gertrude, the two women form an attachment. As time passes, and Gertrude's left arm grows even more disfigured, she visits the local Conjuror Trendle who reveals that Rhoda's cursed touch is behind her ailment: realising her unconscious power to harm Gertrude, Rhoda and her son choose to leave. After Gertrude makes a further visit to Conjuror Trendle, she is told that the only way to counter this bewitchment is to place the afflicted arm on the neck of a hanged man to 'turn the blood' and restore health. Intent upon curing her disfigurement, Gertrude

²⁸⁶ Kathryn R. King, 'Introduction' in *Wessex Tales* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998), pp. xi-xx (p. xi).

²⁸⁷ Peter Widdowson, "'...into the hands of pure-minded English girls': Hardy's Short-Stories and the Late-Victorian Marketplace' in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 364-77 (p. 367).

secretly arranges the treatment but as soon as her flesh touches the corpse its face reveals it to be the illegitimate son of Rhoda and Farmer Lodge. Suddenly, both Rhoda and Farmer Lodge burst into the room and Gertrude dies from shock. As John Sutherland notes, Hardy's Wessex narratives are 'short stories which, like Dickens's, indulge his taste for the supernatural'²⁸⁸ while Romey T. Keys observes that in the tale 'Hardy deploys a panoply of supernatural elements'.²⁸⁹ Yet, it is the rural element which the reviewer for *The Times* foregrounded, stating that '[t]hese idylls of West country life will rank among the truest things that the novelist of the yeomen, the shepherds, and the woodlanders has given us'.²⁹⁰ Although the Wessex landscape dominates the narrative, the supernatural aspects locate 'The Withered Arm' as a further development of Hardy's earlier works, especially *The Return of the Native*.

Once again, Egdon Heath plays a central role in 'The Withered Arm'. Kathryn R. King discusses its importance, noting that the 'journeys across Egdon [...] might be studied as updated notations on the heath so memorably detailed in *The Return of the Native*'. When Gertrude travels across the barren landscape it is personified as 'the same heath which had witnessed the agony of the Wessex King Ina, presented to after-ages as Lear'.²⁹¹ The attention to archaeological and historical detail, which had previously characterised Eustacia Vye's psychological entrapment on Egdon Heath, is once more apparent: an unsettling sense of past cultures invading the present underlies

²⁸⁸ Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction*, p. 278.

²⁸⁹ Romey T. Keys, 'Hardy's Uncanny Narrative: A Reading of "The Withered Arm"', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, n.s. 27:1 (1985), pp. 106-23 (p. 106). In this analysis, Keys compares Hardy's supernatural realm to Freud's definition of the unconscious.

²⁹⁰ Anon., 'Wessex Tales by Thomas Hardy', *The Times*, 2 June 1888, p. 17.

²⁹¹ Thomas Hardy, 'The Withered Arm' in *Wessex Tales* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998), pp. 57-85 (p. 70). All further references to 'The Withered Arm' are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis.

the narrative action while the land itself has an animistic quality.²⁹² More specifically, it is this feeling of an ancient, yet strangely present past, which adds a layered quality to the text, locating Wessex as an archaeological and cultural palimpsest. The ominous Egdon Heath resists any human attempt at management, remaining an untamed wildness which is arguably reflected in the power struggles of its human inhabitants: 'attempts – successful and otherwise – at cultivation on the lower slopes, which intrude and break up the original heath into small detached heaths, had not been carried far' (p. 78). Gertrude's upper-class, domestic lifestyle is in direct contrast to *The Return of the Native*'s presentation of Eustacia's spirited bond with the earth, making it a challenge for Gertrude to cross the ancient and, at times, impenetrable heath-land and access the dwelling of Conjuror Trendle. Although a wealth of parallels can be drawn between 'The Withered Arm' (1888) and *The Return of the Native* (1878) – both are set in the past, both manipulate the ancient wilderness of Egdon Heath and, most notably, both texts allow an ancient pre-Christian past to intrude upon the present – there is a difference. 'The Withered Arm' has a macabre tone, suggesting that in a world devoid of any organised religion – even the pantheistic paganism which characterised Eustacia Vye is missing – the only alternative on offer is a superstitious belief in witchcraft.

The Eustacia/Susan Nunsuch witchcraft narrative which dominates *The Return of the Native* is intensified in 'The Withered Arm's' portrayal of the Gertrude/Rhoda conflict, suggesting that Hardy is still drawing upon supernatural discourse in his 1888 tale of 'tenderness and horror',²⁹³ which Patrick Tolfree terms as 'one of the best

²⁹² For further information on Hardy's involvement in the materialism/animism debate see Sinéad Garrigan Matter's, 'Animism, Fetishism, and the Enchanted Heath', pp. 4-22.

²⁹³ George Wing, *Hardy* (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), p. 22.

short stories in the English language'.²⁹⁴ Surprisingly, however, the most overt and disturbing image of demonic malevolence directly centres upon the 'innocent young' (p. 65) Gertrude in her dream form as she haunts Rhoda. Under the cover of darkness Gertrude's beauty becomes twisted, corrupted and completely transformed as she takes the repulsive form of an oppressive 'incubus' (p. 63), both psychologically and physically tormenting the sleeping Rhoda by the flaunting of Gertrude's wedding ring.²⁹⁵ While the sexual nature of an incubus complicates this same-sex encounter – a spectral incubus is traditionally a male demon who gains sustenance by having sexual intercourse with its sleeping female victim²⁹⁶ – the narrative's insistence upon the reality of this encounter and its consequences for both women is of importance here. While Rhoda's terrified cry of 'that was not a dream—she was here!' (p. 63) foregrounds her horror and demonstrates Hardy's use of Gothic technique,²⁹⁷ her dream-time 'trance' (p. 67) also draws on language of mesmerism: an unconscious mesmeric bond becomes strangely physical, connecting the two women and intertwining both their conscious every-day lives and their unconscious dreams.²⁹⁸ Yet, the outcome of this incident is unpredictable: while Rhoda is positioned as the victim of an incubus assault – suggesting, therefore, that after the dream sequence she should carry the traces of this demonic encounter – it is Gertrude who must endure the subsequent physical anguish. Rhoda's grasp upon the incubus during the dream later seems to leave Gertrude (who is no longer in demon form) with a 'withering limb' (p.

²⁹⁴ Patrick Tolfree, 'Dorchester Prison and Thomas Hardy', *Hardy Society Journal*, n.s. 2:1 (2006), pp. 56-61 (p. 61).

²⁹⁵ For further information on the tradition of dream-time assaults by witches and demons see Owen Davies's 'The Nightmare Experience, Sleep Paralysis and Witchcraft Accusations', *Folklore*, n.s. 114:2 (August 2003), pp. 181-93.

²⁹⁶ Pickering, *Dictionary of Witchcraft* (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 142.

²⁹⁷ Interestingly, James F. Scott's 'Hardy's Use of the Gothic' suggests that Hardy juxtaposes the 'legend and folklore [...] of the Wessex country' with technique of 'Gothic romance' (p. 367).

²⁹⁸ See Linda Holler's *Erotic Morality: the Role of Touch in Moral Agency* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002) and Margrit Shildrick's *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (London: Sage, 2002).

73) that looks 'as if some witch, or the devil himself, had taken hold [...] and blasted the flesh' (p. 67), draining the young woman of vitality. Indeed, Gayla R. Steel describes Rhoda's contaminating touch as a 'witch's mark'²⁹⁹ which has permanently crippled Gertrude's body and, by implication, her subsequent infertility seems to be a real consequence of the metaphysical contaminating incubus incident.³⁰⁰ As in *The Return of the Native*, therefore, the 'real' witch is not necessarily obvious: while Gertrude's incubus intrusion initially places her as the supernatural demon, this is inverted as Rhoda is revealed to be the true perpetrator of the injury.

Nonetheless, Rhoda Brooke's similarities to Susan Nunsuch are limited. Although both women are gradually exposed as the true witches of Egdon Heath, there is a clear difference. Unlike Susan's carefully premeditated act of counterbewitchment against Eustacia Vye, in 'The Withered Arm' the narrative clearly states that Rhoda had never intentionally placed a curse upon Gertrude; her harmful magic is as a result of her unconscious power of the mind. For example, although Rhoda admits that 'she had been slyly called a witch since her [sexual] fall' (p. 66) she is disturbed at the prospect of exercising 'a malign power over people against [...] [her] own will' (p. 66): even though she 'did not altogether object to a slight diminution of her successor's beauty [...] she did not wish to inflict upon her physical pain' (p. 68). Her 'gruesome fascination' (p. 68) with Gertrude has materialised into a supernatural curse which it is beyond Rhoda's power to reverse. Although her heart 'reproached her [Rhoda] bitterly' (p. 65) for unwillingly harming Gertrude, she is not completely innocent. Farmer Lodge's new bride fills Rhoda with jealousy, and she uses her

²⁹⁹ Steel, *Hardy's Witches*, p. 87.

³⁰⁰ Gertrude's bodily infection and infertility after contact with her husband's discarded mistress suggests parallels with the issue of venereal disease which concerned Victorian society; the metaphor of the succubus implies that disease is transmitted through sexual contact as Farmer Lodge's past intercourse with Rhoda seems to have sinister consequences for his new bride.

young illegitimate son to conduct an intense surveillance of Gertrude, implicitly positioning the boy as a witch's familiar. The narrative draws attention to the 'boy's persistent presence', 'hard gaze' (p. 60) and relentless 'stare' (p. 61) which soak up every detail of the young bride's physical appearance and behaviour before relaying the vital information back to his witch-like mother. There is a suggestion, then, that it is Rhoda's twisted obsession with Gertrude that leads to her unintentional conjuring of the incubus. Despite Rhoda's unconscious power to inflict suffering, however, there is no remedy for the curse: an irrational cause must have an irrational solution and, as a result, even the upper-class rational Gertrude reverts to superstition and quack medicine to provide both the answers and the cure.

As 'The Withered Arm' draws to a close, desperation forces Gertrude to trust to the advice of 'superstitious' country people and seek 'the whereabouts of the exorcist' (p. 69), Conjuror Trendle. Once again, the discourse of witchcraft is used, hinting that Gertrude is demonically cursed. Hardy's narrative looks to a 'white wizard' (p. 75), a real figure of folklore who was part of the Dorset culture of Hardy's youth³⁰¹ and which frequently infiltrates his fiction: as M. D. Bailey notes, '[t]hroughout the nineteenth century [...] diviners, traditional healers, cunning folk, and witch doctors [...] continued to practice their craft'.³⁰² With regard to Hardy, in addition to the charms, omens and love-philtres which characterise Physician Vilbert

³⁰¹ In a letter to Hermann Lea, Hardy writes that he has 'read with much interest the proofs of your excellent witch stories. I have no objection whatever to your saying what you say about "Conjuror Trendle"—I do not remember what his real name was, or rather, his is a composite figure of two or three who used to be heard of. I have a vague idea that Baker was the name of one, but cannot be sure. Conjuror Minterne, or Mynterne, who lived out Blackmoor way, you have of course heard of: he was one of the most celebrated. I have ventured to suggest the addition of the words "white witch" as you will see'. See Thomas Hardy, *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, eds. Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), III, p. 265.

³⁰² Bailey, *Magic and Superstition in Europe*, p. 217. For further information on white wizards, see Owen Davies's 'Cunning-Folk in the Medical Market-Place During the Nineteenth Century', *Medical History*, n.s. 43:1 (1999), pp. 55-73 and Owen Davies's 'Cunning-Folk in England and Wales During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries', *Rural History*, n.s. 8:1 (1997), pp. 91-107.

in *Jude the Obscure*, Gayla R. Steel notes how ‘Hardy’s rural people seek out Conjurors’.³⁰³ Moreover, while Hardy’s own 1919 preface to ‘The Withered Arm’ discusses the reality of the incubus scene, stating that ‘I have been reminded by an aged friend who knew “Rhoda Brooke” that [...] my forgetfulness has weakened the fact out of which the tale grew’,³⁰⁴ his own personal interest in folk medicine is further reflected in a letter to his close friend, Edward Clodd, in which he discusses the natural powers of Dorset witch-doctors.³⁰⁵ With regard to ‘The Withered Arm’, it is Conjuror Trendle’s method of understanding the bewitchment which is important:

“Medicine can’t cure it, [...] ’Tis the work of an enemy.” [...] “If you like I can show the person to you [...]” [...] He brought a tumbler from the dresser, nearly filled it with water, and fetching an egg, prepared it in some private way; after which he broke it on the edge of the glass, so that the white went in [...] he took the glass [...] and told Gertrude to watch the mixture closely [...] “Do you catch the likeness of any face or figure as you look?” demanded the conjurer of the young woman. (p. 71)

Predictably, a likeness of Rhoda appears in the mixture, suggesting that Trendle’s unorthodox charm can reveal Rhoda’s unintended curse, thus emphasising the knowledge and controlled power of the white male wizard.³⁰⁶ Although Gertrude knows that the ‘smouldering village beliefs make him [Farmer Lodge] furious’ (p. 76) and that such rural superstition is ‘condemned by the neighbouring clergy’ (p. 76), she defies both her husband and the church in seeking an irrational yet arguably reliable cure. Unexpectedly, however, after diagnosing the source of bewitchment using

³⁰³ Steel, *Hardy’s Witches*, p. 13.

³⁰⁴ Thomas Hardy, ‘Preface’ in *Wessex Tales* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 1998), pp. 3-5 (p. 3).

³⁰⁵ See his letter to Edward Clodd, dated 30 October 1896, in Thomas Hardy, *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, eds. Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980), II, which relates the story of ‘a man, puzzled by this withering of his newly planted choice trees, [who] went to a white witch to enquire who was the evil-worker: the white witch, after ascertaining the facts, told him it was himself’ (p. 136).

³⁰⁶ Interestingly, Emma Hardy’s *Some Recollections* describes how she used the same egg-charm which Conjuror Trendle uses in ‘The Withered Arm’. Emma states that ‘another time, a fortune-telling was singularly prophetic [...] [w]e all liked this proceeding immensely. Into one of these tumblers [...] we each broke an egg, letting the white only drop into the water, then watching what form it would take which should signify the occupation of our future spouses [...] when my turn came, [...] [it was] pronounced [...] “You will marry a writer”.’ (pp. 40-41). Again, there is an implication that Hardy’s fictional charm is based upon Dorset folklore and, as such, Hardy may have been basing Trendle’s action upon Emma’s actual experiences.

simple white magic, Trendle's treatment is darker: shaking his head at the various 'counter-spells which she [Gertrude] had adopted' (p. 74) his only advice for the tormented woman is to 'touch with the limb the neck of a man who's been hanged' (p. 76). A fascination with death pervades the narrative, hinting at Hardy's own morbid preoccupation with the power of the dead – which would later be articulated in his poems after Emma Hardy's death – and, by implication, the power of the soul. 'The Withered Arm's' insistence upon the power of the corpse to affect the living suggests that even the agnostic Thomas Hardy displays a typically nineteenth-century interest in the after-life – something which the 1854 Great Exhibition foregrounded through its Ninevah and ancient Egyptian Courts and their emphasis on spiritual progression. Although Hardy, like Eliot, never wavered from his contempt for the spiritualist movement, there is a sense that his search for something to fill the void left by his loss of faith, forces him into not only the darker paganism which pervades *The Return of the Native* but also into the issues of life force, nature and deathly haunting.

Throughout his life, Thomas Hardy never concealed his ongoing 'interest in the irrational and the occult'.³⁰⁷ From the Wessex folklore and superstitious faith which dominate *The Return of the Native* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, to the incubus that haunts his short story 'The Withered Arm', Hardy's work undoubtedly demonstrates what James F. Scott terms as Hardy's 'preoccupation with graves and corpses'.³⁰⁸ Perhaps unexpectedly, then, Hardy's hostility towards spiritualism conflicts with his literary presentations of disembodied haunting. For example, Edward Clodd sent Hardy a copy of his 1917 book, *The Question: "If a Man Should Die, Shall he Live Again?" Job XIV. 14: A Brief History and Examination of Modern*

³⁰⁷ Scott, 'Hardy's Use of the Gothic', p. 363.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 373.

Spiritualism, in which he criticised the fraudulent aspects of spiritualism, while in response to Clodd's article in the *Daily News* – 'Are "Spirit Messages" Subconscious?' (28 June 1920) which followed Clodd's earlier publications in the *Daily Graphic* entitled 'Spiritualism: An Exposure' (22 June 1920) and 'Spiritualism: Credulous Advocates' (23 June 1920) – Hardy wrote that 'in at least half [of] these performances the medium has been proved to be an impostor. Our ancestors used to burn these mediums – or witches as they were called'.³⁰⁹ Furthermore, Hardy's fiction seems to reflect this anti-spiritualist sentiment. Even in *The Return of the Native* – published 42 years before Hardy's approval of Clodd's spiritualist condemnation – the narrative emphasises how, despite Thomasin's distress at Eustacia's death, a rational element still prevails: even though the woman wishes that 'if we, who remain alive, were only allowed to hold conversation with the dead [...] what we might learn!' she nevertheless reiterates the finality of death, stating that 'the grave has forever shut her in' (p. 313). Yet, Hardy's work is never this decisive. Athena Vrettos notes Hardy's fascination with 'ancestral memory, hypnotism, double consciousness, secondary personality and automatic writing',³¹⁰ subjects which connect Hardy with the spiritualist movement while a sense of displaced memory haunts his later novels – Julian Wolfreys, for example, draws attention to the fact that '[s]pectres are everywhere' in the 'haunted'³¹¹ *Mayor of Casterbridge* – and, most significantly, in

³⁰⁹ Thomas Hardy, *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, eds. Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), VI, p. 31.

³¹⁰ Athena Vrettos, 'Displaced Memories in Victorian Fiction and Psychology', *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 49:2 (Winter 2007), pp. 199-207 (p. 206).

³¹¹ Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 110. More recently, Wolfreys has published a further article on spectrality in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, see 'The Haunted Structures of *The Mayor of Casterbridge*' in *A Companion to Thomas Hardy*, ed. Keith Wilson (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 299-312.

the series of 1912-13 poems to his dead wife Emma which were published in *Satires of Circumstance, Lyrics and Reveries* in 1914.³¹²

Indeed, poems such as 'The Going', 'The Voice' 'The Phantom Horsewoman' and 'The Haunter' all reflect how, as Laurance Estanove describes, 'the boundary between the living and the dead is gradually diminished'.³¹³ Estanove further observes that disembodied voices and memories of the dead, often implicitly his late wife Emma, haunt the poet, before later arguing that 'instead of raising the dead, the poet raises their voices from out of the tomb'.³¹⁴ Although I am not attempting to analyse Hardy's 'Emma Poems' in any detail, what is important here is that even the rationally agnostic Thomas Hardy cannot resist the lure of the unknown: he famously confided to a close friend that 'he would have given ten years of his life to see a ghost'.³¹⁵ A preoccupation with some form of restless spirit/voice lingering after death seems to almost consume Thomas Hardy in this later period: an interest in the paranormal develops. Apparent in works such as *The Return of the Native* and 'The Withered Arm' the issue of life after death is a recurrent theme in his early twentieth-century poetry. Significantly, as in his grief over Emma's loss, Hardy does not turn to Christianity for comfort: instead, older, darker superstitions replace his lost faith.

The mid-Victorian era was a period of enormous change. As Darwinism shook the foundations of Christianity, advancements in science, glorified in the displays of

³¹² For further analysis of Hardy's poetry see, for example, J. O. Bailey's *The Poetry of Thomas Hardy: A Handbook and Commentary* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), Donald Davie's *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) and William W. Morgan's 'Life Story: A Biography of Hardy's "Emma Poems"'.
³¹³ Laurence Estanove, "'Voices from Things Growing in a Churchyard': Hardy's Verse on Both Sides of the Grave", *Thomas Hardy Journal*, n.s. 24 (Autumn 2008), pp. 29-39 (p. 31).

³¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 38.

³¹⁵ F.B. Pinion, *A Hardy Companion*, p. 159.

the 1851 Great Exhibition, threatened to potentially replace a weakening Christian faith. Part of Christianity's previous role – as a discourse to explain the world – was now being replaced by scientific answers and, as a result, was eroding Christian belief. I contend that faced with the rise of science and the erosion of faith, the late-Victorian public turned to the past in search of some new way of fulfilling spiritual need: a new, pre-Christian, discourse began to emerge in the works of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy. While Eliot explored esoteric, non-Christian religions from the East, Hardy maintained a British focus, looking backwards to a pre-Christian past in an attempt to fill in the gaps created by a weakening Christian faith. His writings offer a different perspective, positioning Wessex archaeology as a force in understanding rural superstitions and beliefs in witchcraft. Placed in context, moreover, relics from ancient civilisations captured the public imagination, finding their way into the 1854 Exhibition as the focus moved away from the technological and scientific feats of its 1851 predecessor, towards the Egyptian and Ninevah Courts which dominated the new 1854 Exhibition.

In the face of evolutionary theory, it seems that society needed both the prospect of looking forwards towards the scientific advancements of the future whilst simultaneously craving the reassurance of looking backwards towards ancient cultures and religions. While Eliot's initial juxtaposition of medieval mysticism and the supernatural in *The Mill of the Floss* develops into *Daniel Deronda*'s exploration of ancient Eastern religious practices and histories, Thomas Hardy never fully commits to any religious exploration: instead, his depiction of rural Dorset, and its suggestively heathen superstitions and archaeology, implies that he reverts to an older, darker, pagan tradition. What the works of Eliot and Hardy emphasise, however, is that past

religious beliefs – be it Eliot’s esoteric interest in Eastern religions or Hardy’s pagan advocating of nature-worship and portrayal of disembodied voices – are engendered in part by an attempt to substitute for a failing Christian discourse. Moreover, I argue that it is this mid-Victorian preoccupation with ancient cultures and paranormal aspects of pre-Christian religions which establish the foundations of the late-Victorian surge of interest in Egyptology; the fascination with religious mysticism and spiritualism of ancient Egypt coincides with the height of the British spiritualist movement.

This thesis explores different modes of fiction, from realist texts to novellas and short stories. Significantly, however, the similarities between these very different genres, literary forms and authors all foreground the unsettling issue that the supernatural, quasi-religious creeds and pseudo-science shape very different modes of expression in surprisingly similar ways. More specifically, building upon Hardy’s short horror story and the Christmas works of Dickens, Chapter Three specifically focuses on short fiction again, suggesting that Arthur Conan Doyle and Arthur Machen revert to this form in their exploration of mysticism and esoteric beliefs. Indeed, while late-Victorian society battles to find a balance between logical thinking and a morbid fascination with the spirit world, the work of Machen and Conan Doyle begins to reflect the attitudes of a society concerned with both the non-Christian afterlife and the way in which a supernatural past intrudes upon the supposedly rational present.

Chapter Three (1889 – 1901): Context, Mysticism, Texts

I - Context

(i)

Victorian interest in Egyptology expanded enormously in the 1880s.⁶²⁰ As ancient history increased in popularity with the British population, events such as the archaeological uncovering of the biblical city of Nineveh⁶²¹ and the Ancient Egyptian excavations added a glamour which captured the public imagination. Moreover, these new discoveries seemed to build upon the previous popularity of the 1854 Crystal Palace's 'Egyptian Court' with its 'high pillars, sphinxes, mummies, and enormous statues'⁶²² and reproductions of 'various Egyptian monuments'.⁶²³ Surprisingly, then, while technology and science were making unimaginable leaps into the future, archaeological discoveries encouraged Victorian society to look backwards to the complexities of the past. The steady movement towards gaining an understanding of ancient civilisations gathered impetus in the late-Victorian period – in fiction building upon early- to mid-Victorian literary works such as Edward Bulwer Lytton's Rosicrucian novel *Zanoni*, George Eliot's research into esoteric Eastern religions in

⁶²⁰ For further information see Stephanie Moser, *Wondrous Curiosities: Ancient Egypt at the British Museum* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), M. L. Bierbrier's *Who Was Who in Egyptology* (London: The Egypt Exploration Society, 1995), Bob Brier's *Egyptomania* (New York: Hillwood Art Museum Press, 1992), Jean Vercoutter's *The Search for Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997) and Donald Malcolm Reid's *Whose Pharaohs?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

⁶²¹ Nineveh was a city in Ancient Assyria which is also referred to in the Bible (its first mention is in the Book of Genesis). A few expeditions were conducted during the 1840s by Austen Henry Layard. For more information see John Malcolm Russell's *From Nineveh to New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), Austen Henry Layard's *Nineveh and its Remains: A Narrative of an Expedition to Assyria During the years 1845, 1846, 1847* (London: John Murray, 1849), R. Campbell Thomson's *The Reports of the Magicians and Astrologers of Nineveh and Babylon in the British Museum* (New York: AMS Press, 1977), Il and Robert Silverberg's *The Man Who Found Nineveh: The Story of Austen Henry Layard* (Tadworth: World's Work, 1968). With regard to Nineveh in Victorian literature, see Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem 'The Burden of Nineveh' which was first published in 1856 but later revised for publication in his poetry anthology, *Poems* (1870). For a critical analysis of Rossetti's poem see Andrew M. Stauffer's 'Dante Gabriel Rossetti and The Burdens of Nineveh', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, n.s. 33 (2005), pp. 369-94.

⁶²² Auerbach, *The Great Exhibition*, p. 201.

⁶²³ Samuel Sharpe, *Description of the Egyptian Court; Erected in the Crystal Palace by Owen Jones, Architect, and Joseph Bonomi, Sculptor* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1854), p. 3. Other highlights of the 1854 Exhibition were the Greek, Roman, Alhambra and Nineveh 'Courts'.

Daniel Deronda and Thomas Hardy's passion for Wessex archaeology as explored in *The Return of the Native* – but nowhere is this more apparent than in the surge of interest in Egyptology which began with the 1880 archaeological discovery of the tomb of the Pharaoh Akhenaten.⁶²⁴ Following Jean-François Champollion's 1822 breakthrough translation of the Rosetta Stone, Egyptologists now had the understanding to translate further inscriptions and construct a chronology of Egyptian civilisation.⁶²⁵ As one Victorian critic commented in 1890, 'the decipherment of the hieroglyphics' was the key to 'unlocking the wisdom of Ancient Egypt'.⁶²⁶ The importance of understanding Ancient Egyptian culture swiftly led to the 1883 foundation of the Egypt Exploration Fund which, a critic for *Chamber's Journal* predicted, would 'throw light on some of the most perplexing questions of Egyptian history'.⁶²⁷ During the 1880s, then, interest in Ancient Egypt grew. Although the 1850s and 1860s saw British Egyptology lagging behind that of the French, with their extensive excavations,⁶²⁸ a number of influential British works were published which

⁶²⁴ One of the foremost Victorian Egyptologists was William Matthew Flinders Petrie (1853-1942) whose archaeological excavations secured him the reputation, as Margaret A. Murray notes, of establishing 'the foundation of all modern archaeology'. Margaret A. Murray, *The Splendour that was Egypt* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1964), p. 218. For more information on Petrie's life and achievements see Margaret S. Drower's *Flinders Petrie: A Life in Archaeology* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1985).

⁶²⁵ The Rosetta Stone was a hieroglyphic-inscribed granite rock discovered in 1799. For further information see C. A. Andrews and S. Quirke, *The Rosetta Stone: A Facsimile Drawing* (London: British Museum Press, 1988); Paul Nicholson and Ian Shaw, *The British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 2008).

⁶²⁶ Henry Wallis, 'The Destruction of Egyptian Monuments', *Nineteenth Century: A Monthly Review*, n.s. 28:165 (November 1890), pp. 720-862 (p. 720). More specifically, as Roger Luckhurst notes, in 1882 'decades of politicking and intrigue [between Britain and France] for influence over the government of Egypt were ended by British military occupation', an occupation that permitted further British archaeological investigations. See Roger Luckhurst, 'Introduction' in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. ix-xxi (p. xxvii).

⁶²⁷ Anon., 'The Egypt Exploration Fund', *Chambers' Journal of Popular Literature, Science and Arts*, n.s. 2:70 (May 1885), pp. 278-80 (p. 279).

⁶²⁸ Peter Parsons in *City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish: Greek Lives in Roman Egypt* (London: Phoenix, 2007), for example, writes that '[w]hatever the turn of politics, the exploration of ancient Egypt remained largely their [the French] preserve for the century after Napoleon' (p. 5). Maya Jasanoff in *Edge of Empire: Conquest and Collection in the East 1750-150* (London and New York: Harper, 2006) also notes that during the early- to mid-Victorian period Paris's enormous Louvre museum began its accumulation of 'the world's most comprehensive collections of Egyptian antiquities' (p. 212).

provided the foundations for the late-Victorian revival of interest.⁶²⁹ But perhaps the most significant British symbols of this new-found passion for Egyptology were the artefacts which flooded into the British Museum during the 1880s, symbolising the demand for, and popularity of, Ancient Egypt in the public imagination.

Established by an Act of Parliament in 1753 and opened to the public on 15 January 1759, London's British Museum was, and is, a showcase for human culture. The majority of the Museum's displays were originally donated to King George II for the use of the nation in the will of Sir Hans Sloane (1660-1753), a physicist and naturalist whose collection of antiquities, books, manuscripts and animal specimens totalled over 71,000, out of which over 160 were Egyptian objects.⁶³⁰ The early-nineteenth century saw the Museum expand and develop substantially. For example, after the 'Battle of the Nile' and under the terms of the 'Treaty of Alexandria' (1801) the French army were forced to cede the coveted Rosetta Stone to the British, who swiftly placed it on display in the British Museum.⁶³¹ Building upon the 1854 Crystal Palace's Egyptian 'Court' and subsequent archaeological discoveries, the 1880s were a decade when general interest in Egyptology grew. The British Museum's 1880 appointment of Ernest A. T. Wallis Budge to make official Egyptian purchases for the Museum transformed the way in which the collections were expanded: now the

⁶²⁹ For example, John Kenrick's *Ancient Egypt Under the Pharaohs* (1850) and Reginald Stuart Poole's *Horæ Ægyptiacæ; or, the Chronology of Ancient Egypt Discovered from Astronomical and Hieroglyphic Record* (1851),

⁶³⁰ For a more detailed analysis see G. R. de Beer's *Sir Hans Sloane and the British Museum* (London and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953) and Marjorie Caygill's *The Story of the British Museum* (London: British Museum Press, 1981). For more general information on Victorian museums see Barbara Black's *On Exhibit: Victorians and Their Museums* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000). The *Illustrated London News* later reflected that Sloane's collection was 'unrivalled' in its diversity, costing the collector a total of over £50,000. See Anon., 'The British Museum', *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 7 June 1851, pp. 535-36 (p. 535).

⁶³¹ This landmark ancient relic was soon followed by other acquisitions such as a Roman bust of 'Clytie' in 1805, donated by the collector Charles Townley (1737-1805), as well as a collection of sculptures from Athens, acquired in 1816. See Marjorie Caygill, *Treasures of the British Museum* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1985), p. 68.

museum acquired its collections through purchase, not simply donation. Moreover, under the guidance of Samuel Birch, who was the Ancient Egypt expert at the British Museum from 1836 to 1885, new Egyptian catalogue systems and galleries were established, giving an overdue precedence to the mummies, sculptures and coins which were displayed there: symbolically, Maya Jasanoff observes, this awe-inspiring collection of Egyptian remnants established the Museum as ‘an *Egyptian* museum’ (original italics).⁶³²

Coinciding with the British Museum’s revived interest in Ancient Egypt during the late-Victorian period, another landmark triumph for late-Victorian Egyptology was the erection of ‘Cleopatra’s Needle’ on the Victoria Embankment, London in 1878.⁶³³ Although this towering granite obelisk had been owned but neglected by the British for over half a century, and was only finally moved to London after a private investor paid the transportation and erection bill of over £10,000, public interest in ‘Cleopatra’s Needle’ was, by the late-nineteenth century, substantial enough for the obelisk to be located in a public place where it would be available for all to see. *The Illustrated London News* described it as a ‘famed relic of

⁶³² Jasanoff, *Edge of Empire*, p. 212. ⁶³² A notable Victorian collector of Ancient Egyptian artefacts was Sir Henry Solomon Wellcome (1853-1936). While his vast and largely un-catalogued collection of Egyptian papyrus-based funerary spells, mummified animals, magical amulets and general relics accumulated during his own expeditions to Egypt currently make up the majority of the collection at Swansea University’s ‘Egypt Centre’ (opened in 1998), by 1912 the size of Wellcome’s Egyptian collection had increased so that it was over five times larger than that held at Paris’s Louvre museum. See, for example, Robert Rhodes James’s *Henry Wellcome* (London: Hodder, 1994) and D. Gill’s ‘From Wellcome Museum to Egypt Centre: Displaying Egyptology in Swansea’, *Gottinger Miszellen*, n.s. 205, pp. 47-54. I am indebted to the staff at Swansea University’s ‘Egypt Centre’, especially to Bev Rogers who gave up a great deal of time to help with my research into Henry Wellcome.

⁶³³ Cleopatra’s Needle is an Egyptian obelisk, dating from c.1450 BC and was given to the British government in 1801 by the Ruler of Egypt after the Battle of Alexandria. When the British ‘Cleopatra’s Needle’ (the name given to three Egyptian obelisks now erected in London, Paris and New York) was finally given the financial backing to be moved from Egypt to London in 1877 a whole catalogue of problems followed. After designing and building a new water-tight iron cylinder to transport the obelisk by sea, the mission met with disaster when a storm struck the Bay of Biscay in October 1877, causing the ship to capsize, killing six sailors. The Needle was finally delivered to London on 21 January 1878. See R. A. Hayward’s *Cleopatra’s Needle* (Buxton: Moorland, 1978).

the antique world', emphasising how another Ancient Egyptian artefact had found its way into the heart of the British Empire.⁶³⁴

Paralleling this interest in ancient civilisations and their religions, the spiritualist movement in Britain rapidly gained prominence in the 1870s – leading to the formal recognition of the 'Spiritualist National Federation' in 1891 – which lasted into the early twentieth century. Janet Oppenheim explains how during this period, mediums at *séances* were 'men, women and children who claimed to function as channels of communication between the living and the dead'.⁶³⁵ Spiritualism apparently allowed personal interaction between the medium and spirit, and so seemed to offer empirical evidence for life after death. An interest in the Ancient Egyptian notion of the afterlife suggests the late 1880s witnessed a new fascination with the dead. Building upon the earlier mid-nineteenth-century custom of *post-mortem* paintings and death masks, it became popular in the 1870s for grieving parents to pose for photographs with infant corpses.⁶³⁶ But this was as close as ordinary individuals could get to the dead: verbal intercourse with the spirits of the departed required the psychic powers of a spiritualist medium. In the 1870s, however, a new vogue for physical mediumship or materialisation – whereby the medium

⁶³⁴ Anon., 'Cleopatra's Needle', *Illustrated London News*, Saturday 21 June 1851, p. 578.

⁶³⁵ Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England 1850-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 7. A great deal of critical attention focuses predominantly on the role of women in the Victorian spiritualist movement, arguing that female mediums achieved a new level of freedom of expression outside the woman's traditional role of daughter, wife, mother and 'angel in the house'. See Alex Owen's *The Darkened Room*, Judith R. Walkowitz's 'Science and the Séance: Transgressions of Gender and Genre in Late-Victorian London', *Representations*, n.s. 22 (1988), pp. 3-28. Regenia Gagnier's 'Mediums and the Media: A Response to Judith Walkowitz', *Representations*, n.s. 22 (1988), pp. 29-36, *Women Madness and Spiritualism*, eds. Bridget Bennett, Helen Nicholson, Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 3 vols, Diana Basham's *The Trial of Women* and, more recently, Tatiana Kontou's 'Women and the Victorian Occult', *Women's Writing*, n.s. 15:3 (December 2008), pp. 275-81.

⁶³⁶ Harvey's *Photography and Spirit*, Pearsall's *Table Rappers* and Clement Cheroux, Pierre Apraxine, Andreas Fischer, Denis Canquihelm, Sophie Schmit's *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2005).

claimed to produce a spirit substance called ectoplasm which took on the characteristics of the actual ghost of a dead person – apparently allowed the *séance* sitter visual as well as aural contact with the spirit world.

Importantly, spiritualism needed the backing of science for credibility and supporters ‘tended to emphasize the purportedly scientific foundations of their beliefs when they urged the claims of spiritualism to public attention and respect’.⁶³⁷ Consciously trying to avoid the fate of mesmerism –practitioner Dr. Elliotson’s initial success in categorising it as a new branch of science fell apart following the exposure of the fraudulent O’Key sisters⁶³⁸ – the true advocates of spiritualism were careful to encourage scientific investigation while simultaneously distancing themselves from any suspected case of fraud. Vital support came from Sir William Crookes (1832-1919).⁶³⁹ Aware of the fierce debate surrounding the issue of psychic phenomena, Crookes decided to intervene, beginning his own investigations in 1870 shortly before joining the Society for Psychical Research (SPR). Adamant about conducting the *séances* at his own house under controlled conditions, Crookes used scientific tests to provide answers, documenting his findings in articles such as ‘Spiritualism Viewed in the Light of Modern Science’ (1870), ‘Experimental Investigation of a New Force’ (1871) and ‘Some Further Experiments on Psychic Force’ (1871) in addition to a complete summary of his experience with mediums entitled *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism* (1874).⁶⁴⁰ Yet Crookes’s painstaking investigations, often

⁶³⁷ Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 199.

⁶³⁸ See Winter’s *Mesmerised* for a detailed analysis.

⁶³⁹ Crookes was a prominent chemist and physicist who founded the science magazine *Chemical News* in 1859 and discovered the element thallium in 1861.

⁶⁴⁰ For further information see Caryn E. Neumann’s ‘Sir William Crookes’ in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, ed. John Hannavy (London: Routledge, 2005), I, pp. 349-51.

using elaborate electrical circuits, and his final conclusion in support of spiritualism, were subverted by his relationship with the beautiful young medium Florence Cook (1856-1904).⁶⁴¹ Nonetheless this respected man of science was willing to risk controversy, condemnation and ridicule in an attempt to provide scientific evidence in support of his belief in the paranormal.

One of the most active investigators of psychic phenomena was Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900). Intrigued by the intensity of the spiritualist movement, and having previously displayed an interest in the issue of life after death by joining the Cambridge University Ghost Club, Sidgwick began attending *séances* in 1864 before his interest led him to become a member of the Metaphysical Society, founded in 1869. Significantly, between 1873 and 1880, Sidgwick enquired into psychic occurrences as part of the Sidgwick Group although his main investigative work occurred after the formation of the SPR in 1882.⁶⁴² As Pearsall explains, the SPR consisted of 'members of the British National Association of Spiritualists, established in 1873, renamed the Central Association of Spiritualists in 1882',⁶⁴³ whose purpose was to explore paranormal events in an impartial and scientific manner, working both to expose fraud and uphold genuine cases of psychic powers. Elizabeth Wadge reiterates its prestigious reputation, stating that '[w]ithin a short time the SPR boasted a membership list groaning with scientific authority, eventually attracting [...] Nobel

⁶⁴¹ Originally intending to investigate Cook's supposed power to materialise a spirit called Katie King, rumours of an amorous attachment between Crookes and Cook soon surfaced, suggesting, as Pearsall notes, that the chemist 'deliberately allowed himself to be taken in'. See Pearsall, *Table Rappers*, p. 226. For a more detailed analysis on the Crookes-Cook scandal see, for example, Trevor H. Hall's *The Spiritualists: the Story of Florence Cook and William Crookes* (London: Duckworth, 1962)

⁶⁴² Other founding members of the Society were Edmund Gurney, Frederic William Henry Myers, William Fletcher Barrett and Edmund Dawson Rogers. For further information on the Society of Psychical Research see Alan Gauld's *The Founders of Psychical Research* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968).

⁶⁴³ Pearsall, *Table Rappers*, p. 218.

Prize recipients',⁶⁴⁴ while Pamela Thurschwell further notes that '[p]sychical research, the scientific study of the occult [...] emerged as a discipline in the late nineteenth century'.⁶⁴⁵ In the wake of new technological advancements such as Michael Faraday's discovery of the laws of electrolysis and the invention of the telegraph, therefore, questions were being raised about the connections between electromagnetism and spirit communication.⁶⁴⁶ But not all the scientific community was convinced. Although men like Sidgwick and other members of the SPR were open-minded about their spiritualist investigations, exposing falsehoods but equally admitting the possibility that certain incidents may have paranormal explanations, others displayed a more direct hostility towards spiritualism. Podmore, who joined the SPR in 1883, commented that 'by the use of some ingenious apparatus Faraday showed conclusively that the movements [of table turning] were due to muscular action',⁶⁴⁷ while Pearson notes that:

Scientists who believed in spiritualism were in a minority, and sceptical scientists were constantly being coaxed to give spiritualism a trial. Faraday did so, and came out against it [...] Huxley was hostile, and Darwin was not greatly interested.⁶⁴⁸

It took a brave scientist, therefore, to voice full support for spiritualism. Afraid of risking fragile scientific reputations by giving credence to the movement, many investigators resisted backing psychic phenomena.

⁶⁴⁴ Wadge, 'Scientific Spirit', p. 28.

⁶⁴⁵ Pamela Thurschwell, *Literature, Technology and Magical Thinking 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. xi.

⁶⁴⁶ Alison Winter in *Mesmerized*, notes that 'mesmeric and electronic phenomena were marshalled to account for spirit-rapping [...] [and] table-turning' (p. 295).

⁶⁴⁷ Podmore, *Mediums of the Nineteenth Century*, II, p. 9.

⁶⁴⁸ Pearsall, *Table Rappers*, p. 225.

Although Sidgwick's investigations surprised the scientific community, the impact of his support for psychic investigations was minimal in comparison to that of Alfred Russel Wallace's (1823-1913) passion for the subject. Upheld by the *Saturday Review* as having 'high repute as a naturalist of logical and observant mind',⁶⁴⁹ he was a pioneer in the field of biology and a contributor to the theory of evolution by natural selection in the 1850s.⁶⁵⁰ Nevertheless, coexisting with this scientific and suggestively rational frame of mind was an underlying interest in the supernaturally inexplicable. In 1866 he published *The Scientific Aspects of the Supernatural*, declaring that 'I now propose to give [...] instances [...] of preter-human or spiritual beings',⁶⁵¹ while on 22 November of the same year Wallace wrote to Huxley, confessing that 'I fear you will be much shocked, but I can't help it; and before finally deciding that we are all mad I hope you will come and see some very curious phenomena'.⁶⁵² But, while Wallace superficially conformed to the image of a rational man of science – having previously grown sceptical of the miracles recorded in the Bible, lost his Christian faith and declared himself an agnostic⁶⁵³ – his passion for spiritualism was, more often than not, scorned by his fellow men of science. Consequently, as John J. Cerillo observes, 'he kept himself aloof from the scientific community and publicly criticised

⁶⁴⁹ Anon., 'Wallace on Natural Selection', *Saturday Review*, n.s. 29 (May 1870), pp. 709-10.

⁶⁵⁰ See Chapter Two of this thesis for more information on Wallace's role in Darwin's 1859 publication of *Origin of Species*.

⁶⁵¹ Alfred Russel Wallace, *The Scientific Aspects of the Supernatural: Indicating the Desirableness of an Experimental Enquiry by Men of Science into the Alleged Powers of Clairvoyants and Mediums* (London: Farrah, 1866), p. 20.

⁶⁵² Alfred Russel Wallace, *Alfred Russel Wallace: Letters and Reminiscences*, ed. James Marchant (London and New York: Cassell, 1916), II, p. 187. Although Huxley initially dismissed the issue, stating that 'I never cared for gossip in my life, and disembodied gossip, such as these worthy ghosts supply their friends with, is not more interesting to me than any other' (*ibid.*, p. 187) he eventually attended a *séance* in 1874. Predictably, however, Huxley remained unconvinced and documented what he believed to be the fraudulent aspects of the spiritualist *séance* in his correspondence with Darwin. For an analysis of the correspondence between Huxley and Darwin on the subject of spiritualism see, for example, Wilma George's *Darwin*, pp. 243-48 and William Irvine's *Apes, Angels and Victorians*, pp. 8-10.

⁶⁵³ See Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 305.

the “materialist” values of Victorian scientists’,⁶⁵⁴ focusing instead on research into psychic phenomena. Following the success of his first article, ‘A Defence of Modern Spiritualism’ (1874), in which he discussed ‘evidence [...] so varied and so extraordinary [...] that it is not possible to do it [spiritualism] justice without entering into considerable detail’⁶⁵⁵ he published two further articles entitled ‘Modern Spiritualism – Are its Phenomena in Harmony with Science?’ (1885) and ‘If a Man Die, Shall he Live Again?’ (1887), as well as a collection of essays published under the title *On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism* (1875), after observing numerous spiritualist feats and being ‘satisfied [...] of their genuineness’.⁶⁵⁶ However, this enthusiasm for spiritualism strained Wallace’s relationship with the scientific community: Peter Raby notes that that it ‘harmed him in the eyes of the great and good, who distributed influence’.⁶⁵⁷ Most offensive to his scientific opponents was, as Malcolm Jay Kottler explains, that ‘he introduced spiritualism into his published papers, as an explanation for those features of man found inexplicable by natural selection’.⁶⁵⁸ controversially, spiritualism for Wallace became a means of explaining evolution at a moral and intellectual level. Although spiritualism ‘was, to Wallace, the science of the spiritual nature of man, [...] during the second half of his life spiritualism also became his religion’, providing answers about the existence of the soul – something which, for him, the concept of the Christian afterlife had failed to provide. The Church of England was challenged by spiritualist supporters who began to view their movement as a new and important creed.

⁶⁵⁴ Cerillo, *Secularization of the Soul*, p. 28.

⁶⁵⁵ Alfred Russel Wallace, ‘A Defence of Modern Spiritualism’, *Fortnightly Review*, n.s. 15 (1874), pp. 630-58 (p. 630).

⁶⁵⁶ Alfred Russel Wallace, *On Miracles and Modern Spiritualism: Three Essays* (London: Trübner and Co., 1881), p. 31.

⁶⁵⁷ Raby, *Alfred Russel Wallace*, p. 4.

⁶⁵⁸ Kottler, ‘Alfred Russel Wallace’, p. 145.

One of the fundamental anxieties which religion offers to resolve is the issue of life after death: religion frequently functions to provide answers, consolation and reassurance that death is not the end for the human soul. Yet, in late-Victorian England an age of scientific rationality, it seems that society craved empirical evidence for the Church of England promise of an afterlife, evidence which could not be provided: a strong faith in the truth of the Gospels was needed. As Oppenheim observes, in an effort to ‘calm [...] fears, and to seek answers where contemporary churches were ambiguous, thousands of British men and women [...] turned to spiritualism’.⁶⁵⁹ According to Geoffrey K. Nelson, the ‘spiritualist system of beliefs is extremely complex and varied’ and ‘far from being a homogenous religion [...] [with] many schools of thought within the movement’,⁶⁶⁰ but spiritualism, unlike mesmerism or any other Victorian pseudo-science, precisely publicised its position as a religion. Moving away from its initial role as a ‘parlour pastime’⁶⁶¹ and despite it being ‘singularly unspiritual in that it is concerned to demonstrate its claims by scientific methods’,⁶⁶² spiritualism gradually intensified its religious aspects. The spiritualist William Howitt, a one time contributor to *Household Words*, quoted the Gospels in evidence of what he believed to be instances of ‘Biblical Spiritualism’⁶⁶³ while Daniel Dunglas Home paraded himself as what the late-Victorian scientist William Carpenter sarcastically terms ‘the Arch-priest of this new religion’,⁶⁶⁴ intent upon foregrounding the parallels between spiritualism and Christianity. The Church of England, however, was divided. Although men such as the Reverend N. S. Godfrey, who argued that

⁶⁵⁹ Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 1.

⁶⁶⁰ Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, p. 205.

⁶⁶¹ Pearsall, *Table Rappers*, p. 29.

⁶⁶² Nelson, *Spiritualism and Society*, p. 135.

⁶⁶³ Howitt, *History of the Supernatural*, p. 129.

⁶⁶⁴ William Carpenter, ‘Psychological Curiosities of Spiritualism’, *Fraser’s Magazine for Town and Country*, November 1877, pp. 541-64 (p. 541). More specifically, Home was careful to incorporate his own Christian faith: his second wife reflects that ‘few men have ever searched the Scriptures more attentively and constantly than Home’, emphasising Home’s insistence that spiritualism and Christianity complimented each other. See Mme. Home, *His Life and Mission*, p. 224.

‘there is a connection between Table-moving, and [...] [the] evil influences’⁶⁶⁵ of Satan, and the Reverend J. B. Clifford, who equally warns of ‘false Christs and false prophets, pretending to be supernatural powers’,⁶⁶⁶ a number of clergymen were more open minded. Reverend Charles Maurice Davies stated that ‘I cannot help thinking that clergymen and scientists ought to look into [...] [these] opinions’.⁶⁶⁷ Late-Victorian spiritualism, then, attempted to bridge the gap between this world and the next, aiming to work together with the Church of England and science in order to provide the empirical evidence of life after death which society craved. But spiritualism’s claim to religious status also paved the way for more extreme occult creeds.

One of the most influential break-away movements from late-Victorian spiritualism which brought together Eastern beliefs and spiritualism was theosophy: the loose-knit nature of spiritualism meant that splinter groups were a regular occurrence. Sally Mitchell describes theosophy as a broad spectrum of ‘occult and mystical philosophies often pantheistic in nature, which hold that knowledge does not reside in a set of beliefs [...] but unfolds from within the human spirit’.⁶⁶⁸ Similarly to the spiritualist movement, moreover, theosophy⁶⁶⁹ was not a new creed. The origins of theosophy date back to sixth century neo-Platonist philosophers⁶⁷⁰ although its nineteenth-century revival, culminating in the foundation of the Theosophical Society

⁶⁶⁵ Reverend N. S. Godfrey, *Table-Moving Tested and Proved to be the Result of Satanic Agency* (London: Thames Ditton, 1853), p. 19.

⁶⁶⁶ Clifford, *Modern Witchcraft*, p. 4.

⁶⁶⁷ Davies, *Mystic London*, p. 291.

⁶⁶⁸ *Victorian Britain: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Sally Mitchell (Chicago and London: St. James Press, 1988), p. 803.

⁶⁶⁹ Theosophy is word which derives from the Greek *theosophia* meaning ‘divine wisdom’ or ‘wisdom of the gods’.

⁶⁷⁰ For a detailed account of the origins of theosophy see Michael Gomes, *The Dawning of the Theosophical Movement* (London: Theosophical, 1897).

in 1875, was a direct product of late-Victorian occult thought. Ronald Pearsall summarises the basis of Victorian theosophy:

in Tibet a brotherhood whose members have a power over nature denied to ordinary men [...] have committed themselves to a special relationship with the Theosophical Society, and performed many marvels for it [...] the members [of this mysterious brotherhood] [...] were called *Adepts* or Mahatmas. The Mahatmas were reputed to be able to cause apparitions of themselves to appear wherever they willed, to communicate with those whom they visited, and to observe whatever was going on.⁶⁷¹

More specifically, Victorian theosophists self-consciously separated themselves from materialism, placing an emphasis upon their affinity with the spiritual teachings of Eastern religions such as the Kabbalah, Hinduism and Buddhism: as Oppenheim notes 'it comes as no surprise to see the East emerging [...] as the repository of true wisdom [...] Christianity had been hopelessly compromised by its concessions to science'.⁶⁷² Theosophy, then, re-emerged at a time when late-Victorian society was increasingly willing to embrace the occult aspects of religion: as the mysticism of Christianity was eroded by the Church's attempt to relate itself to science and provide elements of proof rather than simply asking for faith, individuals sought mysticism elsewhere.

Theosophy shared many obvious resemblances to spiritualism. Both movements focused upon the importance of the human spirit, both challenged the idea that science could explain everything about nature or God and, most importantly, both foregrounded the supernatural aspects of their doctrines. The interchanges between late-Victorian spiritualism and theosophy are evident in the knowledge that the founding members of the 1875 Theosophical Society – Colonel Henry Steel Olcott (1832-1907) and Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) – first met as

⁶⁷¹ Pearsall, *Table Rappers*, p. 211.

⁶⁷² Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 182.

spiritualists. But there is a difference.⁶⁷³ While theosophy's affinity with the spiritual teachings of the East helps differentiate it from spiritualism, the greatest clash between the two arose over the issue of reincarnation.⁶⁷⁴ Mitchell explains that theosophists believed that 'reincarnation governs all growth by laws of justice of karma, and it is through successive embodiments in physical form that spirit finally attains to god-hood'.⁶⁷⁵ In line with the late-Victorian Egyptian excavations which revealed an ancient belief that 'the soul of man is immortal [...] [and] when the body perishes it enters into some other animal, constantly springing into existence',⁶⁷⁶ theosophy combined the ancient Egyptian, Hindu and Buddhist teachings of reincarnation. Nevertheless, Victorian theosophists did acknowledge what Oppenheim terms as an 'astral plane' which was intertwined with the plane of daily life but believed that it 'was inhabited by non-human "spooks, elementaries and elementals," as well as "cast-off lower principles of former men and women, masquerading as [...] friends"'.⁶⁷⁷ Spiritualist adherents clashed with the new doctrine of theosophy in spite of initial similarities and aims in 'longing[s] to reveal timeless religious truth'.⁶⁷⁸ In effect, therefore, theosophy was a threat to the spiritualist movement. But the most dangerous aspect proved not to be the theosophical occult teachings but its spell-binding leader: Madame Blavatsky was a compelling woman who held sway over her followers through extravagant claims of occult knowledge and supernatural powers.

⁶⁷³ Although Blavatsky claimed to have telepathic powers and was acting as a spiritualist medium up until 1873, shortly after meeting Olcott in 1874, Blavatsky 'disclosed to him her real beliefs and her deeper knowledge of things occult'. Stewart, *Bulwer Lytton as Occultist*, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁴ By contrast to the spiritualist belief in the continuation of the human spirit and preservation of individual personality – something which a spiritualist medium claimed to prove by transmitting messages from the dead to their living relatives – the theosophists, under the guidance of Blavatsky, argued that the souls of the departed were reborn in the afterlife, moving on to a completely new existence after death.

⁶⁷⁵ Mitchell (ed.), *Victorian Britain*, p. 803.

⁶⁷⁶ Murray, *Splendour of Egypt*, p. 130.

⁶⁷⁷ Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 165.

⁶⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p. 166.

Diana Basham describes Madame Blavatsky as ‘a circus equestrienne, a spirit medium and psychic investigator, a prostitute, a disciple of Tibetan masters, [...] a soldier, [...] a business entrepreneur [...] [and] assistant of D. D. Home’.⁶⁷⁹ While Blavatsky encouraged this confusing re-shaping of her own past – even parading as a widow in order to enter a bigamous marriage – her affinity with esoteric Buddhist spirituality remained constant. Importantly, in New York in 1875, she gathered enough support to found the Theosophical Society whose motto was ‘There is no religion higher than truth’.⁶⁸⁰ She was described by Henry R. Evans, an ardent anti-theosophist, as exercising ‘a powerful personal magnetism over those who came in contact with her, [...] the sphinx of the second half of this century; a pythoness in tinsel robes’.⁶⁸¹ Blavatsky certainly divided opinion. Her theosophical followers believed she promoted ‘the study of comparative religion, philosophy, and science [...] [and investigated] mystic or occult powers latent in life and matter’⁶⁸² while opponents suggested that her knowledge of Masonic, Rosicrucian and Templar rituals – coupled with what Robert Lee Wolf calls her reputation as a ‘dedicated Bulwer addict’ – were simply regurgitated in her own writings, making the content unoriginal and repetitive.⁶⁸³ Nevertheless, as Davenport-Hines observes, ‘[h]aving become high

⁶⁷⁹ Basham, *Trial of Woman*, p. 206. Born Helena Hahn on 31 July 1831 in Ekaterinoslav, Ukraine, Blavatsky travelled extensively and this taste for exotic travel sparked an interest in Eastern spirituality, specifically Buddhism which, as Richard Davenport-Hines observes, drew her to Tibet in 1867 ‘where she remained in spiritual seclusion studying esoteric mysteries until 1870’. See Richard Davenport-Hines, ‘Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna (1831–1891)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40930> [accessed 1 Sept 2009]. Moreover, Davenport-Hines emphasises how she ‘proclaimed herself as the chosen messenger of [...] [a] celestial brotherhood without explaining why she had been chosen’, impressing people with her supposed esoteric religious knowledge and occult powers yet rejecting closer scrutiny.

⁶⁸⁰ Cranston, *HPB*, p. 192.

⁶⁸¹ Henry R. Evans, *Hours with the Ghosts of Nineteenth Century Witchcraft* (Chicago: Laird and Lee, 1897), p. 213.

⁶⁸² Davenport-Hines, ‘Blavatsky’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40930> [accessed 1 Sept 2009].

⁶⁸³ Wolff, *Strange Stories*, p. 186. The most detailed exploration of Edward Bulwer Lytton’s influence upon Madame Blavatsky is S. B. Liljegren’s ‘Bulwer Lytton’s Novels and *Isis Revealed*’ in *Essays and*

priestess of a new religious system (which, however, she insisted was a science), Blavatsky next produced its bible'.⁶⁸⁴ Despite repeated allegations of fraud, however, Blavatsky and her writings attracted many adherents to theosophy. At the time of Blavatsky's death in 1891, therefore, the nineteenth-century theosophical revival was more intense and powerful than anybody could possibly have predicted.⁶⁸⁵

Despite her flaws, the void left by Madame Blavatsky's death was hard to fill. Her overbearing personality, almost militant leadership and passion for esoteric Eastern religions emerged at a time when late-Victorian society was already craving a greater understanding of ancient beliefs in the spiritual afterlife, an issue which even the agnostic and anti-spiritualist George Eliot chose as a focus in *Daniel Deronda*. The contemporary archaeological discoveries in Egypt, coupled with the spiritualist craze for contacting the dead, provided an optimum environment for theosophy. Reassuringly for tentative Church of England doubters, theosophy, like spiritualism, claimed to offer spiritual guidance which could compliment and coincide with mainstream Church of England doctrine (theosophists regarded Jesus as one of their ancient supporters), claiming that spiritual truth, rather than one unified religion, was

Studies on English Language and Literature, ed. S. B. Liljegren (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp. 7-60.

⁶⁸⁴ Davenport-Hines, 'Blavatsky', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40930> [accessed 1 Sept 2009]. Claiming to have used occult powers to telepathically document the words of the Mahatmas, Blavatsky published *Isis Unveiled* (1877), documenting what she calls her 'intimate acquaintance with Eastern adepts and study of their science'. See Helena P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology* (New York and London: Bernard Quaritch, 1877), p. v.

⁶⁸⁵ Madame Blavatsky's predecessor, Annie Besant (1847-1933) was a prominent theosophist, women's rights activist and politician in India. After losing her Christian faith and separating from her husband, the Reverend Frank Besant, in 1874 she moved to London to embrace her new-found intellectual freedom. Significantly, in 1888 she became interested in theosophy after studying Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, choosing to join the Theosophical Society as Blavatsky's disciple before eventually taking over as one of the Society's leaders in 1895. For further information see, for example, Anne Taylor's *Annie Besant: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), Arthur Nethercot's *The First Five Lives of Annie Besant* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961) and Arthur Nethercot's *The Last Four Lives of Annie Besant* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1963).

at the heart of their ideology. Importantly, moreover, Madame Blavatsky appeared to offer empirical evidence to reinforce this new quasi-religion. In claiming that *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) was a work transmitted to her in an unknown language by masters of the esoteric Tibetan Brotherhood, Blavatsky constructed an image of herself as ‘the visible agent of transcendent powers’⁶⁸⁶ whose complex writings were proof of her genuine knowledge of ancient spirituality. By contrast to the scientific rationality of mid-Victorian England – as displayed in the 1851 Great Exhibition – late-Victorian society had now turned its gaze to past religions in search of a solution to the perplexing issue of life after death. Both theosophy and spiritualism claimed to offer such solutions, but theosophy never reached the same level of popularity as spiritualism. As Ruth Brandon observes, ‘theosophy remained the preserve of [...] the dedicated occultists, while spiritualism [...] continued to attract the attention and avid interest of some of the most brilliant minds of the age’.⁶⁸⁷

Similarly to other eminent late-Victorian spiritualists/scientists such as Alfred Russel Wallace and William Crookes, medical man and author Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was a firm convert to a belief in the spirit world and an investigator of ancient civilisations. In contrast to the early-Victorian clear divide between spiritualism and scientific materialism, as evident in Bulwer Lytton’s closeted investigations into spiritualism and Charles Dickens’s and George Eliot’s open contempt for the subject, late-Victorian England witnessed a wider acceptance of psychic phenomena and a willingness to associate them with science. It seems that in the absence of religious faith, the overriding thirst for knowledge about life after death converted many

⁶⁸⁶ Davenport-Hines, ‘Blavatsky’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/40930> [accessed 1 Sept 2009].

⁶⁸⁷ Brandon, *The Spiritualists*, p. 239.

apparently rational scientific men to a belief in the paranormal, including Arthur Conan Doyle and Arthur Machen.

II - Arthur Conan Doyle

(i)

Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle (1859-1930) was born in Edinburgh on 22 May 1859. The third of nine children, Conan Doyle's parents were Mary Doyle (1838-1921), *née* Foley, an Irish Roman Catholic immigrant, and Charles Altamont Doyle (1838-1893), an alcoholic artist and draughtsman descended from the Irish 'father of the modern political cartoon', John Doyle (1797-1868).⁶⁸⁸ Throughout Conan Doyle's life, he remained proud of his Irish descent and was known as Arthur Conan Doyle even though he never legally established the surname of Conan Doyle. Pierre Norden explains how 'like his elder sister Annette he had his father's uncle, Michael Conan, for godfather, and [...] his name was thus carried on by his nephew and niece'.⁶⁸⁹ Indeed, naming was important to the Doyle family. As Martin Booth observes, '[t]he choice of names was not fortuitous. Ignatius was selected because it was common practice for Irish Catholic families to include saints in a child's given names' while Michael Conan's fascination with the Celtic legend of King Arthur may have influenced his nephew's Christian name.⁶⁹⁰ Significantly, the family's Celtic origins and Catholic faith were important elements in Conan Doyle's childhood.

⁶⁸⁸ Martin Booth, *The Doctor, The Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle: A Biography of Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997), p. 3. For further biographies on Arthur Conan Doyle see, for example, Reverend John Lamond's *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Memoir* (London: Murray, 1931), Adrian Conan Doyle's *The True Conan Doyle* (London: Murray, 1945), Ivor Brown's *Conan Doyle: A Biography of the Creator of Sherlock Holmes* (London: Hamilton, 1972) and, most recently, Andrew Lycett's *Conan Doyle: The Man who Created Sherlock Holmes* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2007).

⁶⁸⁹ Pierre Norden, *Conan Doyle*, trans. Frances Partridge (London: Murray, 1966), p. 18.

⁶⁹⁰ Booth, *The Doctor*, p. 7.

In spite of the relative poverty which the Doyle family experienced during Arthur Conan Doyle's youth, his Irish mother was adamant that her eldest son should receive a good education. Suitable Catholic boys' schools were limited and, after taking advice from Michael Conan, Mary Doyle decided that the Jesuit-run Stonyhurst College in Lancaster would be the most appropriate.⁶⁹¹ Conan Doyle attended Stonyhurst from 1868 to 1875 but during his school days the young boy suffered bouts of homesickness, missing his mother but finding solace in the Scottish ballads of Sir Walter Scott and in his new-found love of sport. While this period of his life is significant in sparking an intense interest in story-telling – Walter Scott's Celtic literature excited Conan Doyle's imagination – importantly it was also during his time at Stonyhurst that Conan Doyle's Catholic faith started to weaken: a gradual process of erosion began which, not uncommonly in the period, ended in a declaration of agnosticism.

After being baptised into the Roman Catholic faith of his parents, Conan Doyle's religious upbringing was traditional. At the age of ten, and while boarding at his Jesuit school, he wrote to his mother on 30 May 1869 describing his first communion: 'Oh mama, I cannot express the joy that I felt on the happy day to receive my creator into my breast [...] though I live 100 years I shall never forget that

⁶⁹¹ Although its fees were £50 per annum, the Jesuits offered to pay Arthur's tuition on the condition, as Martin Booth in *The Doctor* notes, that 'his parents agree to allow him to dedicate his life to a career in the Catholic Church [...] as a Jesuit brother, priest or, at least, a professional who would give himself to the order' (p. 19). Reluctant to commit her son to a Jesuit future, Mary Doyle rallied to provide the money herself with the help of his wealthy uncles. Arthur Conan Doyle had four uncles: Michael Conan, James Doyle, Henry Doyle and Richard Doyle. Richard 'Dicky' Doyle (1824-1883), is his most famous relative. Displaying an incredible artistic talent from a very early age, Richard began publishing his first caricatures at the age of fifteen although his breakthrough came when he joined the staff of *Punch* magazine as a cartoonist and illustrator in 1849. For further information see Michael Heseltine, 'Doyle, Richard (1824-1883)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/8005> [accessed 2 Sept 2009].

day'.⁶⁹² Conan Doyle's initial enthusiasm for Catholicism, however, did not last. Although, as Pierre Norden notes, '[t]here was no question of breaking with the Catholic influences traditional in the Doyle family',⁶⁹³ especially as a result of his father's fervent beliefs, he kept his ever-growing scepticism secret. Disillusioned by the Jesuit education he was receiving at Stonyhurst, Conan Doyle applied himself instead to sport.⁶⁹⁴ The young schoolboy continued to distance himself from Catholicism even though he never communicated his doubts to his family. Martin Booth observes how Conan Doyle secretly confessed his anxieties to a fellow pupil, admitting that 'the longer he remained at Stonyhurst the less he felt an affinity for Catholicism':⁶⁹⁵ indeed, writing later he reflected how 'nothing could exceed the "uncompromising bigotry of the Jesuit theology"'.⁶⁹⁶ Luckily for Conan Doyle, his mother was also beginning to move away from the Roman Catholicism in which she had been raised in Ireland, displaying what Jeffrey L. Meikle terms as a 'merely nominal faith'⁶⁹⁷ and arguably paving the way for her son's later complete abandonment of conventional religion, and her own subsequent conversion to Anglicanism. *En route* to his open avowal of agnosticism in 1882, Conan Doyle distanced himself from the Jesuit system of belief, turning most importantly, to a study of the sciences in the form of a medical degree at Edinburgh University, a qualification which would enable his early profession as a doctor and which was in part an inspiration for his later works of fiction.

⁶⁹² Arthur Conan Doyle, *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters*, ed. Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower, Charles Foley (London: Harper Press, 2007), p. 22.

⁶⁹³ Norden, *Conan Doyle*, p. 19.

⁶⁹⁴ Conan Doyle wrote to his mother in 1870 that 'I am Head of a match in cricket and am considered the best player of my size in the Lower Line'. See, Doyle, *A Life in Letters*, p. 39.

⁶⁹⁵ Booth, *The Doctor*, p. 24.

⁶⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.25.

⁶⁹⁷ Jeffrey L. Meikle, "'Over There": Arthur Conan Doyle and Spiritualism', *Library Chronicle of the University of Texas*, n.s. 8 (1874), pp. 23-37 (p. 23).

Conscious of his family's poverty – the Doyles were now forced to take in lodgers to supplement their income – Conan Doyle moved back home and enrolled at Edinburgh University to read medicine in October 1876. While Martin Booth foregrounds Conan Doyle's suitability to enter the profession, noting how '[h]e was patient, diligent in his studies, observant and sympathetic towards the sick',⁶⁹⁸ Jon Lellenberg also observes the more negative aspects of this stage in Conan Doyle's life, emphasising how he 'found medical school one "long weary grind at botany, chemistry, anatomy, [...] and [...] [other] compulsory subjects [...] which have a very indirect bearing upon the art of curing'.'⁶⁹⁹ The course proved rigorous and, as a result of the intensity of the lectures and the time-constraints that this imposed, there are few letters documenting his early medical school life.⁷⁰⁰ Nonetheless, when his mother left Edinburgh to visit Irish relations in September 1876, her doting son found the time to correspond, writing to her about a £40 bursary he hoped to win and confessing his worries that 'often as many as 50 candidates go in for it'.⁷⁰¹ While Conan Doyle ultimately failed to secure the much needed bursary, extra money did come in via the publication of his fiction after 'The Mystery of Sasassa Valley' appeared in *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* on 6 September 1879'.⁷⁰² After disrupting his studies by undertaking work as a doctor's assistant in Birmingham and Sheffield, Conan Doyle took further time away from Edinburgh University, embarking on an adventure of his own. From February to September 1880 he sailed on the *Hope*, an Artic whaler

⁶⁹⁸ Booth, *The Doctor*, p. 43.

⁶⁹⁹ Jon Lellenberg, Daniel Stashower, Charles Foley, 'The Medical Student' in *Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters* (London: Harper Press, 2007), pp. 89-92 (p. 90).

⁷⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p. 90.

⁷⁰¹ Doyle, *A Life in Letters*, p. 92.

⁷⁰² Owen Dudley Edwards in 'Doyle, Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan (1859-1930)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32887> [accessed 2 Sept 2009] observes how Arthur Conan Doyle's 'first published story was a mock-authentic South African yarn'.

where he worked as the ship's surgeon under Captain John Gray.⁷⁰³ Arriving home in September 1880, Conan Doyle was a changed man: his experiences at sea gave him an aura of maturity and worldliness. Returning to Edinburgh University, Conan Doyle graduated in 1882, leaving both his studies and naval adventures firmly behind him and entering a new world as a medical doctor.

Conan Doyle's financial hardship and relative lack of success as a newly qualified doctor are well documented.⁷⁰⁴ Importantly, moreover, a simultaneous struggle with religion further troubled the young man. Unable to continue the pretence of conforming any longer, in 1882 he openly declared his agnosticism to his staunch Roman Catholic Irish relatives: as Pierre Norden notes, Conan Doyle 'told them that he had lost his faith, or at least that "Catholicism" was now a word without religious meaning for him',⁷⁰⁵ angering his uncles, especially Michael Conan, and causing a breach with him that was to prove final. Although his more tolerant uncle, Richard Doyle, did attempt some form of a reconciliation in 1883 by sending the struggling Arthur Conan Doyle letters of recommendation to give to the Catholic Bishop of Portsmouth, the 'young doctor destroyed his letters',⁷⁰⁶ in defiance: Conan Doyle did not want the Catholic church to help in any way. During this period of financial

⁷⁰³ In Doyle, *A Life in Letters*, he writes home to his mother during the first month at sea, declaring himself to be 'never more happy in my life. I've got a strong Bohemian element in me, I'm afraid, and the life just seems to suit me' (p. 123). Indeed, the athletic young man seemed to relish the excitement of hunting 'formidable brutes' (p. 125) such as whales, sea elephants and seals, writing to Mary Doyle at the close of the expedition that 'I have enjoyed my voyage immensely [...] I don't think you would have recognised me [...] I make the most awful looking savage [...] my face covered with dirt [...] and my hands with blood' (p. 126).

⁷⁰⁴ Following a briefly ill-fated partnership with a Dr. Budd in Plymouth, he moved to Southsea in Portsmouth in the hope of building a more successful practice on his own. See, for example, Andrew Lycett's *Conan Doyle* which documents his various set-backs as a young doctor in both Plymouth and Southsea.

⁷⁰⁵ Norden, *Conan Doyle*, p. 29.

⁷⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p. 30.

trouble Conan Doyle searched for new ways of supplementing his income. Writing to Mary Doyle in June 1882, he explains how 'I have two magazine articles ready to start and several in my head at which I will work hard',⁷⁰⁷ before later repeating that 'I have a wonderful story on hand, "The Winning Shot", about mesmerism and murder and chemical magnetism and a man's eating his own ears because he was hungry'.⁷⁰⁸ This was an early insight into Conan Doyle's fascination with pseudo-science, the supernatural and mystery, a theme which would recur frequently in his work and later preoccupy his personal life.

In April 1884, *Cassell's Saturday Journal* published Conan Doyle's exploration of science, deviant sexuality and the supernatural in his chilling tale 'John Barrington Cowles'. Representing what Catherine Wynne terms as 'the most hazardous exposition of mesmeric abilities',⁷⁰⁹ the story follows the beautiful Kate Northcott, who uses mesmerism to control her suitors before revealing to them her true identity as a werewolf. In 1894 Conan Doyle published a novella, *The Parasite* which, as Charles Press notes, focuses on 'a doctor's sexual attraction, turned obsession, for a Miss Penclosa who has mesmerised him'.⁷¹⁰ Although he later tried to distance himself from the novella by leaving it out of his list of publications, at this point it seems that after becoming professionally fascinated by mesmerism and hypnotism Conan Doyle could not resist incorporating it into his fiction: his medical training and scientific rationality did not prevent him taking an interest in pseudo-

⁷⁰⁷ Doyle, *A Life in Letters*, p. 164.

⁷⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p. 165.

⁷⁰⁹ Catherine Wynne, 'Arthur Conan Doyle's Domestic Desires: Mesmerism, Mediumship and *Femmes Fatales*' in *Victorian Literary Mesmerism*, ed. Martin Willis, Catherine Wynne (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 223-43 (p. 227).

⁷¹⁰ Charles Press, 'When did Arthur Conan Doyle Meet Jean Leckie?', *Baker Street Journal*, n.s. 56:2 (Summer 2006), pp. 52-64 (p. 53).

science and the supernatural. For example, 'The Winning Shot' (1893) – a tale which focuses on the human use of the preternatural – builds upon earlier works such as 'John Barrington Cowles', exploring the idea that mankind can somehow control the supernatural while 'The Captain of the Pole-Star' (1890) is fascinating evidence of Conan Doyle's venture into vampire fiction. Indeed, although Conan Doyle is famous for his collection of detective stories focusing upon the rational use of forensic evidence by the scientifically-minded Sherlock Holmes (the story *The Study in Scarlet* [1887] was the first of many) his imagination was not fixed upon detective fiction.⁷¹¹ The supernatural emerges as a distinctive feature of Conan Doyle's non-Sherlock Holmes work. Having rejected the strong Catholicism of his youth and become fascinated with psychic investigation into the spirit world, the agnostic Conan Doyle was now free to investigate other avenues of more unconventional spirituality and supernatural phenomena in both his fiction and personal life.

With the founding of the Society of Psychical Research (SPR) in 1882, science became a tool for investigating the unknown. Conan Doyle's early interest in mesmerism paved the way for more controversial examinations: Charles Higham notes that Conan Doyle 'had attended *séances* as early as 1879'⁷¹² while Norden emphasises Conan Doyle's contact with the paranormal, observing how in 1880 he

⁷¹¹ What is significant about the Sherlock Holmes stories is that arguably for the first time, a detective uses forensic evidence in order to solve the mystery: an emphasis on scientific rationality prevails. For further information and analysis on Sherlock Holmes as detective fiction see, for example, Lawrence Frank's, *Victorian Detective Fiction and the Nature of Evidence*, Stephen Knight's *Crime Fiction 1800-2000: Detection, Death, Diversity* (London: Palgrave, 2003) and E. J. Wagner's *The Science of Sherlock Holmes: From Baskerville Hall to the Valley of Fear, the Real Forensics Behind the Detective's Greatest Cases* (London: John Wiley, 2007).

⁷¹² Charles Higham, *The Adventures of Conan Doyle: The Life of the Creator of Sherlock Holmes* (New York: Norton, 1976), p. 61.

attended ‘a lecture called “Does death end all?” by a spiritualist’.⁷¹³ Moreover, as Martin Booth observes, in the early 1880s, the young doctor investigated ‘Buddhism, reincarnation and karma. From Buddhism he came to Theosophy [...] [but his] belief faded when Blavatsky was exposed as a fraud’⁷¹⁴ although his curiosity lingered. By contrast to other agnostics such as Thomas Hardy, George Eliot, T. H. Huxley and Charles Darwin, who displayed unwavering contempt for psychic phenomena, Conan Doyle fell more in line with scientists such as Alfred Russel Wallace and William Crookes who believed that the supernatural required thorough scientific examination. Conan Doyle’s enthusiasm for psychic investigation was ignited. Importantly, it was during the early 1890s that Conan Doyle’s fascination with the paranormal intensified and he became a member of the SPR in November 1893, beginning a long-lasting correspondence with Sir Oliver Lodge (1851-1940), a renowned physicist, pioneer of the wireless and radio telegraphy and ardent spiritualist. Together with other sympathetic members of the SPR, Conan Doyle dedicated his spare time to scientifically evaluating occultist claims, which resulted, as John Dickson Carr observes, in ‘a gigantic accumulation of data on his psychic studies and experiences’ as well as a ‘psychic library of some 2,000 volumes’.⁷¹⁵ What began as scientific investigations, however, resulted in a belief in psychic phenomena, especially spiritualism, which never wavered throughout the remainder of Arthur Conan Doyle’s life.

Initially, Conan Doyle was sceptical of the spiritualist movement. His medical studies had trained the young doctor to search for material explanations and empirical evidence, something which the early spiritualist movement – prior to the scientific

⁷¹³ Norden, *Conan Doyle*, p. 33.

⁷¹⁴ Booth, *The Doctor*, p. 121.

⁷¹⁵ John Dickson Carr, *The Life of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Murray, 1949), p. 325.

support of William Crookes and certain members of the SPR – lacked. Kelvin I. Jones notes Conan Doyle's original resistance, explaining how during the early 1880s, for Conan Doyle, spiritualism 'lacked a clearly defined philosophy and was anarchic in structure. Theosophy, on the other hand, seemed attractive [...] having a "very-well-thought-out and reasonable scheme"'.⁷¹⁶ The flamboyant figure of Madame Blavatsky was certainly appealing: her passionate support and knowledge of ancient Egyptian spirituality and Eastern esoteric religions appealed to Conan Doyle's interest in his own ancient Celtic origins (displayed via his early passion for Arthurian romance and Scott's Celtic ballads) as well as his ever-growing interest in the supernatural. Nonetheless, it was spiritualism, as opposed to the later discredited theosophy movement, which held Conan Doyle's interest. In old age Conan Doyle would refer to spiritualism as 'the most important thing in my life'⁷¹⁷ after devoting huge amounts of time and money to his spiritualist crusade, claiming that '[t]he spiritual world is complex and enormous, comprising an infinite number of beings of every grade ranging from the sprite to the archangel'.⁷¹⁸ As Conan Doyle stated in his *History of Spiritualism* (1926), although his interest in the phenomena intensified in the early 1900s, his 'investigation dates back as far as 1886',⁷¹⁹ especially his examinations into the advent of spirit photography after 'the first example in England [...] [was] verified [...] in 1872'.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁶ Kelvin I. Jones, *Conan Doyle and the Spirits: The Spiritualist Career of Arthur Conan Doyle* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1989), p. 61.

⁷¹⁷ Arthur Conan Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1924), p. 395.

⁷¹⁸ Arthur Conan Doyle, 'Introduction' in *An Amazing Séance and An Exposure* (London and Edinburgh: Sampson Low and Maston, 1919), pp. ix-xii (p. x).

⁷¹⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism* (London: Cassell, 1926), II, p. 224.

⁷²⁰ *ibid.*, p.123. Conan Doyle's interest in spirit photography intensified as his belief in the spiritualist movement grew. He eventually published his view on the subject in Arthur Conan Doyle, *The Case for Spirit Photography* (London: Hutchinson, 1922).

However, it seems that the turning-point for Conan Doyle was his wife's terminal illness. After her diagnosis of consumption in 1893, Conan Doyle took Louise to Davos in Switzerland but, as Charles Higham explains, whilst there Conan Doyle 'reverted to an interest in other worlds'.⁷²¹ He began to make a new study of psychic phenomena, re-examining at Davos the findings reported by the Scottish Dialectical Society'.⁷²² It seems that the prospect of Louise Conan Doyle's death spurred her agnostic husband into exploring the contentious issue of the spiritual afterlife, an exploration which intensified after her death in 1906 and continued after his subsequent re-marriage, in 1907, to Jean Leckie who was more sympathetic towards spiritualist philosophies. Although, as Philip A. Shreffler notes, 'Conan Doyle was not swept along by the occult tidal wave' there is a sense that after the First World War and the death of both his son and his brother, Conan Doyle's perspective altered as he 'cast away the last shreds of materialist scepticism and openly embraced the [spiritualist] movement'.⁷²³ Indeed, although the early 1900s saw Conan Doyle continue the scientifically rational Sherlock Holmes stories, simultaneously he was turning into an avid supporter of the spirit world and a self-confessed believer in fairies.

The early 1900s also witnessed a blossoming friendship between Conan Doyle and the celebrated illusionist Harry Houdini (1874-1926). Daniel Stashower explains

⁷²¹ Consumption is the name for the disease Tuberculosis (*Tubercle Bacillus*). Throughout the Victorian period this much-feared and almost always fatal infection attacked the lungs with sufferers displaying common symptoms such as coughing-up blood, fever and weight loss. For further information see *Social Conditions, Status and Community 1860-1920*, ed. Keith Laybourn (Stroud: Sutton, 1997).

⁷²² Higham, *The Adventures of Conan Doyle*, p. 117.

⁷²³ Philip A. Shreffler, 'A Spiritualist Crusade' in *The Quest for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Thirteen Biographers in Search of a Life* ed. Jon L. Lellenberg (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), pp. 91-95 (p. 91).

that, after meeting Houdini, who was ‘the world’s most outspoken anti-spiritualist crusader’,⁷²⁴ Houdini and Doyle struck up an odd friendship. Although Houdini had originally wanted to use spiritualism to contact the soul of his beloved mother, his belief in the movement failed. Relations between the two men deteriorated after Houdini dismissed Conan Doyle’s belief that the illusionist had supernatural powers of his own: as Bernard M. L. Ernst points out, ‘Houdini constantly reiterated that he had no such powers, but that everything he did was accomplished by pure trickery and skill’.⁷²⁵ Inevitably the friendship broke when Conan Doyle’s second wife, Jean, claimed to have contacted the spirit of Houdini’s mother, something which he refused to accept. As Ruth Brandon observes, ‘[f]or the DoYLES, Houdini was wilfully blind and appallingly ungrateful. For Houdini, a frightful mockery had been made of his deepest feelings’.⁷²⁶ All communication between them ended with Houdini’s damning anti-spiritualist publication, *Magician Among the Spirits* (1924). Moreover, during this time Conan Doyle’s enthusiasm for the supernatural – which culminated in his work documenting alleged fairy sightings, *The Coming of the Fairies* (1922), which left him ‘undisturbed by the ridicule with which the book was greeted’⁷²⁷ – was becoming increasingly unorthodox and irrational. As Conan Doyle’s investigations into notions of life after death intensified it seems that his spiritualist sympathies began to resemble a religion rather than a hobby for the increasingly eccentric author.

⁷²⁴ Daniel Stashower *Teller of Tales: the Life of Arthur Conan Doyle* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), p. 380.

⁷²⁵ Bernard M. L. Ernst *Houdini and Conan Doyle: The Story of a Strange Friendship* (London: Hutchinson, 1933), p. 102.

⁷²⁶ Brandon, *The Spiritualists*, p. 173.

⁷²⁷ Julian Symons, *Portrait of an Artist: Conan Doyle* (London: Whizzard Press, 1979), p. 116.

Almost unrecognisable from the agnostic young doctor who created the logical detective Sherlock Holmes, the turn of the century witnessed a change in Arthur Conan Doyle which proved to irreversible; he was now not only a passionate supporter of spiritualism but also actively involved in trying to convert the general public to his cause. Building upon his ever-strengthening conviction of the truth of spiritualism – Jeffrey L. Meikle emphasises Conan Doyle's excessive gifts to the spiritualist periodical *Light*: he donated '£4,250 over a seventeen month period from 1896 to 1898'⁷²⁸ – Conan Doyle now devoted his time as well as his money to strengthening the movement.⁷²⁹ Yet what is most striking is not his enthusiasm but his subsequent conversion to the religious aspects of spiritualism. Again, writing in 1924 Conan Doyle notes that:

Why should we fear a death which we know for certain is the doorway to unutterable happiness? [...] You may say that we have already all these assurances in the Christian revelation. It is true, and that is why we are not anti-Christian so long as Christianity is the teachings of the humble Christ and not of his arrogant representatives.⁷³⁰

There is a sense, then, that spiritualism acted as both a replacement and a supplement for his lost Christian creed, offering a new kind of faith which is stripped of the ceremony and unnecessary pageantry of the Roman Catholicism of his youth.

⁷²⁸ Meikle 'Conan Doyle and Spiritualism', p. 24.

⁷²⁹ As early as 1924 Conan Doyle reflects upon his gruelling lecture tour, which took him across Britain, America, Australia and the continent. In Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* he observes that '[i]n this mission I have already travelled more than 50,000 miles and addressed 300,000 people, beside writing seven books upon the subject' (p. 1).

⁷³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 406.

Ultimately, the spiritualist's evidence of the continuation of the human soul was enough to convince Conan Doyle to cast aside his long-standing agnosticism and embrace what he terms as the 'true religion'.⁷³¹ As John Dickson Carr explains:

His religious philosophy in its final form might be summed up in this way: the centre for all belief was the New Testament, with Christ and His teachings as its inspiration. "Wherever I go," Conan Doyle once remarked "There are two great types of critics. One is the materialist gentleman who visits on his right to eternal nothingness. The other is the gentleman with such a deep respect for the Bible that he has never looked into it." There was, in his philosophy, no such thing as death.⁷³²

Arthur Conan Doyle experienced a strange erosion of faith: from a staunch Catholic he succumbed to doubt, agnosticism and finally materialism before performing a complete u-turn, beginning first as an investigator of psychic phenomena and finally embracing spiritualism as a substitute religion. What emerges is Conan Doyle's open-minded attitude towards various aspects of the supernatural, occultism and paganism. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that he embraced the late-Victorian interest in ancient Egyptian narratives, using public fascination in Egyptology and mummy unwrappings to captivate his readers. Conan Doyle's 'The Ring of Thoth' (1890) and 'Lot No. 249' (1894) reflect his interest in Eastern cultures, as emphasised in his initial investigation of the Egyptian elements of theosophy, as well as curiosity about the afterlife. In sharp contrast to the Sherlock Holmes narratives and neglected by literary critics in favour of Conan Doyle's more popular writings, these short stories capture the period's preoccupation with depicting ancient civilizations in fiction. I contend that 'The Ring of Thoth' and 'Lot No. 249' are important in tracing Conan Doyle's unconventional relationship with esoteric religions. Published at a time when he had firmly moved away from the Roman Catholicism of his youth, this was a moment when Conan Doyle was exploring both ancient Egyptian spirituality and late-

⁷³¹ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, p. 407.

⁷³² Carr, *The Life*, p. 327.

Victorian psychic phenomenon on his journey towards a complete conversion to spiritualism. Similarly to Hardy's exploration of ancient British paganism and Eliot's fascination with Eastern mysticism, Conan Doyle's relates his own belief in spiritualism to an ancient non-Christian world, exposing a fascination with ancient occultism which disconcertingly shapes his Egyptian short stories.

(ii)

Originally published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in January 1890, 'The Ring of Thoth' directly draws upon popular fascination with the ancient past intruding upon the present, focussing specifically on the figure of the Egyptian mummy.⁷³³ Coinciding with Ancient Egyptian religious practices – whereby the *ka*, or soul, of the person was believed to return to the dead body in the afterlife – the preservation of the dead by mummification was vitally important for the continuation of the spirit after death.⁷³⁴ In the nineteenth century, however, mummified bodies became a form of entertainment rather than medicine.⁷³⁵ More specifically, Ancient Egyptian mummies became the focus of the middle- and upper-class amusement actually practiced in

⁷³³ In March 1890 'The Ring of Thoth' was bought by Longmans who published it in a collection of ten short stories under the title, *The Captain of the Polestar*.

⁷³⁴ The mummification of a body was both a technical and a ritualised process. Shortly after death, vital organs were removed from the body and placed in canopic jars ready to be buried along with the mummified body. Bodies were then left in a dry natron solution for 40 days before being packed with aromatics and coated in resin, turning the skin a dark shade. Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson in *Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* observe that the 'Arabs mistook this blackening [of the skin] for the effects of bitumen, and it is from their word for this *mummiya* – that the word "mummy" derives' (p. 213). The process from death to burial normally took around 70 days. For further information on mummies and the Ancient Egyptian belief in the afterlife see Jasmine Day *The Mummy's Curse: Mummymania in the English Speaking World* (London: Routledge, 2006) and Bob Brier's *The Encyclopedia of Mummies* (Gloucester: Sutton, 2004) and Jacquetta Hawkes, *The First Great Civilizations: Life in Mesopotamia, the Indus Valley, and Egypt* (London: Hutchinson, 1973).

⁷³⁵ Ruth Firor notes that up until the eighteenth century 'the moss from a dead man's skull, and mummy, an unguent made from the flesh of a corpse continued to be employed' as a cure for rheumatism. L. Green in 'Mummymania: The Victorian Fascination with Ancient Egypt's Mortal Remains', *KMT: A Modern Journal of Ancient Egypt*, n.s. 3:4 (1992), pp. 34-37 notes, '[a]t one time in the Nineteenth Century, ground-up mummy was a key ingredient in a pigment called "mummy brown".' (p. 35).

household parlours, known as ‘mummy unwrapping’ whereby the embalmed mummy was slowly unravelled, revealing a blackened corpse which was then dissected and, as L. Green notes, ‘discarded like any other party favour’.⁷³⁶ Mummified remains became visual spectacles as the Victorian present intruded into a sacred, ancient past.⁷³⁷ Egyptology captivated the late-Victorian public as a topic warranting serious study and the mummy became a popular image in literature.

In the wake of precursor novels such as Jane Webb Loundon’s *The Mummy! A Tale of the Twenty-Second Century* (1827) and Théophile Gautier’s *The Story of a Mummy* (1856) in addition to the short stories which filled the periodicals – such as John Waller’s ‘How I Became an Egyptian’ (1856), J. Austin’s ‘After Three Thousand Years’ (1868) and Louisa May Alcott’s ‘Lost in a Pyramid: or, the Mummy’s Curse’ (1869) – the period 1890-1914 saw a new wave of Ancient Egyptian fiction. Indeed, H. Rider Haggard’s *She* (1887), Richard Marsh’s *The Beetle* (1897) and Bram Stoker’s *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903) are just a few of the narratives focused upon Ancient Egyptian magic and romance which responded to the late-Victorian public’s craving for the topic. Among the earliest Egyptian-inspired works were Arthur Conan Doyle’s two supernatural stories, ‘Lot No. 249’ (1892) and ‘The Ring of Thoth’ (1890). Concurrent with the Egyptian theme which connects these short stories is their shared emphasis upon the magical aspects of Ancient Egyptian culture. The juxtaposition of religious spirituality with magical practices and the

⁷³⁶ Green, ‘Mummymania’, p. 36.

⁷³⁷ In spite of the gruesome aspects of this ‘game’, mummy unwrapping was extremely popular with the aristocracy. For example, Samuel Birch – a leading Egyptologist who helped reform and prioritise the Egyptian antiquities at the British Museum – was invited to perform the task of unwrapping the 20 Egyptian mummies brought back by the Prince of Wales in 1868. The most prolific unroller, however, was the English physician Thomas ‘Mummy’ Pettigrew (1791–1865) who performed one of the first public mummy unwrappings on 6 April 1833 before publishing his scientific and anatomical observations in *History of Mummies* (1834). Pettigrew’s fame intensified when the Duke of Hamilton engaged Pettigrew to mummify him after death: Hamilton died in August 1852.

belief in the continuation of life after death are recurring themes throughout much late-Victorian mummy fiction, suggesting once again that the ancient past is used as a discourse for addressing the Victorian period's own anxieties and preoccupations concerning the progress of the soul in the afterlife.

Belief in magic pervaded Ancient Egypt's pantheistic religious and medical practices, providing supernatural help, guidance, protection and even malevolent curses: as Lise Manniche discusses, '[f]rom the most ancient times magic came to the assistance of man' explaining how for the Egyptians even a 'picture possessed a magic force which worked in daily life as well as in the Hereafter'.⁷³⁸ While healing spells, amulets, love potions, and the ritualised worship of Thoth, the Egyptian god of magic,⁷³⁹ were features of daily life in Ancient Egypt, it was, as John H. Taylor notes, the 'conspicuous use of magic for the dead' which is relevant to this thesis.⁷⁴⁰ An obvious example of the interchangeability between magic and religion is the Egyptian funerary text, *The Book of the Dead*.⁷⁴¹ Consisting of over 200 spells, many wealthy Egyptians arranged to have a copy of *The Book of the Dead* buried next to, or wrapped within the bandages of, their mummified body for use by their departed spirit in the afterlife. I suggest that it was this ancient notion of the progress of the soul onto

⁷³⁸ Lise Manniche, *Sexual Life in Ancient Egypt* (London and New York: Routledge, 1987), p. 103. Another excellent work on Egyptian magic is El Mahdy's *Mummies, Myth and Magic in Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames, 1989).

⁷³⁹ Thoth was the Egyptian god of magic and wisdom with a human body and the head of an ibis (a sacred bird). He was believed to have developed the arts, sciences and hieroglyphics. See Lass, Kiremidjian, Goldstein, *Dictionary of Classical and Literary Allusion*, p. 220.

⁷⁴⁰ John H. Taylor, *Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum Press, 2001), p. 186.

⁷⁴¹ For further information on *The Book of the Dead* see Erik Hornung's *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Afterlife* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999) and Ramses Seleem's *The Illustrated Egyptian Book of the Dead: A New Translation with Commentary* (Alresford: Godsfield Press, 2004).

different spirit worlds which appealed to the Victorians and which influenced Conan Doyle.⁷⁴²

‘The Ring of Thoth’ was inspired by Conan Doyle’s 1888 visit to Paris after which he wrote to his mother on 14 November 1888, saying he had ‘[g]ot a good idea for a story in the Louvre’.⁷⁴³ Martin Booth places this narrative in context, explaining how Conan Doyle was ‘[c]ashing in on the intense public curiosity about Egyptology, in which, [...] Conan Doyle was not only interested but well read’.⁷⁴⁴ Indeed, as Susan D. Cowie and Tom Johnson further explain, ‘Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote two mummy stories during the 1890s that reflect his lifelong interest in all things occult’⁷⁴⁵ emphasising how the late-Victorian surge of interest in Egyptology infiltrated the literature of the period, especially these short stories of Conan Doyle who relished the opportunity of combining his passion for fiction with his interest in Eastern spirituality

Focusing upon John Vansittart Smith, an acclaimed Egyptologist, ‘The Ring of Thoth’ follows the protagonist’s strange nocturnal experience when he is accidentally locked inside the Ancient Egyptian wing of the Louvre Museum in Paris. Becoming transfixed by the ‘inhuman and preternatural’⁷⁴⁶ appearance of one of the

⁷⁴² As A. A. B. Barb in ‘Mystery, Myth and Magic’ in *The Legacy of Egypt*, ed. J. R. Harris (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 138-69 explains, they were, in effect, ‘guide-books [...] or passports into life eternal’ (p. 147).

⁷⁴³ Doyle, *A Life in Letters*, p. 255.

⁷⁴⁴ Booth, *The Doctor*, p. 126.

⁷⁴⁵ Susan D. Cowie and Tom Johnson, *The Mummy in Fact, Fiction and Film* (London: McFarland, 2002), p. 152.

⁷⁴⁶ Arthur Conan Doyle, ‘Ring of Thoth’ in *The Captain of the Pole-Star and Others* (Teddington: Echo Library, 2008), pp. 142-54 (p. 142). All further references are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis.

Louvre's attendants, Smith falls into a deep sleep. After a number of hours he wakes up in the now deserted museum only to find that he is not alone. Concealing himself from view, Smith observes the strange movements of the mysterious Louvre attendant, noticing how the man moves silently from mummy to mummy with an 'air of sinister import' (p. 145). Finally, the hidden Smith witnesses the attendant take down a female mummy, carefully peeling away the bandages before taking up a large ring and smearing it with an unknown liquid substance. However, at this point the mysterious man notices Smith and threatens to kill the Egyptologist if he interferes in any way. But, finding out about Smith's Egyptological background, the attendant confesses that his name is Sosra and that he is an Ancient Egyptian Priest of Osiris⁷⁴⁷ from the Temple of Thoth who had abused his understanding of herbs to create a magical elixir of eternal life. He had shared his secret and the elixir with a fellow priest, but subsequently they had both fallen in love with the same woman, Atma. After her death, both had been left inconsolable with grief, but Sosra explains how his fellow priest discovered another potion which could reverse eternal life and bring an end to the suffering of eternal heartbreak without Atma. The priest spitefully refuses to share the secret of death with Sosra and had hidden the potion in a Ring from the Temple of Thoth. After wandering the earth for thousands of years, Sosra finds the ring on the night that Smith falls asleep in the Louvre, and unwraps the bandages of his beloved Atma so that they may finally be reunited: Conan Doyle's short story closes with Sosra's long-desired death.

⁷⁴⁷ As Lass, Kiremidjian, Goldstein in *Dictionary of Classical and Literary Allusion* explain, Osiris was one 'of the chief gods of ancient Egypt, forming a trinity with his wife-sister Isis and son Horus; originally a wise king who spread civilization throughout Egypt and other parts of the world. He married his sister, Isis, who ruled in his place while he travelled over the world. Upon his return, Seth, his evil brother, had him murdered but Isis restored him to life through magic arts' (p. 165).

On a basic level, 'The Ring of Thoth' alludes to the mid- to late-Victorian fascination with ancient cultures, apparent as early as the 1850s with the Egyptian Court in the 1854 Exhibition. For example, when Vansittart Smith wakes up to find himself locked inside the Egyptian collection of the Louvre Museum, he reacts by noting how he 'was alone with the dead men of a dead civilisation' (p. 145) before reflecting upon the artefacts surrounding him, observing that from 'stately Thebes, from lordly Luxor, from the great temples of Heliopolis, from a hundred rifled tombs, these relics had been brought' (p. 145). What is made clear is that the past is not dead. These inanimate artefacts are instilled with a powerful sense of history which gives them a form of life. Collected together from the ruins of fallen empires, the relics possess an unexplained power over the living beings who are drawn to see them. 'The Ring of Thoth' also builds upon the mid-Victorian trend for 'mummy unrollings'. Exploiting the public's desire to deconstruct a mummified body – be it as a gruesome parlour game, a scientific experiment or as an anthropological investigation conducted in a museum – the ancient Egyptian corpse was an object of fascination. The moment when Vansittart Smith secretly observes the immortal attendant's reunion with the preserved body of his love is described in terms of a mummy unwrapping:

squatting down beside it [the mummy] [...] he began with long quivering fingers to undo the cerecloths and bandages which girt it round. As the crackling rolls of linen peeled off one after the other, a strong aromatic odour filled the chamber, and fragments of scented wood and of spices pattered down upon the marble floor. It was clear [...] that this mummy had never been unswathed before. (p. 146)

Every detail of the operation is carefully documented and described by a fascinated narrator. The dried remains of the mummified corpse are gently released from the numerous layers of bandages, revealing a woman trapped in a form of life-in-death: the body is preserved, acting as tangible relic of the departed soul. Interestingly, there

are parallels between the language of Conan Doyle's 1890 fictional account of a mummy unwrapping and the numerous reports of the practice which filled the early- to mid-Victorian newspapers. For example, *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal* comments upon the practice as early as 1834, observing how '[t]here are many who feel delight in witnessing the unrolling of endless bandages, smiling at the hieroglyphics, and then staring at the dried remains' before noting the human element to these 'shows' emphasising how these mummified objects are really 'being[s] who moved on the earth three or four thousand years ago'.⁷⁴⁸ Regardless of the writer's ironic tone, it is clear that past civilisations were seen to influence the present. Both the *Chambers'* article and Conan Doyle's 'Ring of Thoth' reiterate the fact that the past is not isolated but impacts upon the present. Most significant are Conan Doyle's allusions to and interest in the possibility of supernaturally preserved eternal life.

Conan Doyle's rejection of Catholicism and subsequent attraction to psychic phenomena repeatedly informs much of his fiction. Combined with his passion for Egyptology and Eastern spirituality, as reflected in his initial support for theosophy and final conversion to spiritualism as a religion, Conan Doyle's willingness to accept new, and often unconventional, theories about the powers of the unknown is an important aspect of his life story. Susan D. Cowie and Tom Johnson reiterate this, noting the author's reaction to rumours of a 'Pharaoh's Curse' following Lord Carnarvon's mysterious death after discovering Tutankhamun's tomb in 1925: in an interview he stated that '[o]ne does not know what elementals existed in those days, nor what their power might be. The Egyptians knew a great deal more about those

⁷⁴⁸ Anon., 'Egyptian Mummies', *Chambers' Edinburgh Journal*, n.s. 4:118 (1834), pp. 110-11 (p. 110)

things than we do'.⁷⁴⁹ More specifically, in 'The Ring of Thoth' the narrative is full of allusions to the preternatural. Described as 'something inhuman' (p. 143), the Louvre attendant has an unsettling appearance which Vansittart Smith claims to have 'never seen in a human' before, commenting that his 'strange dark eyes [...] broke into a look of something akin to both horror and to hatred' (p. 144). There is a kind of haunting taking place in 'The Ring of Thoth'. By contrast to the restless spirits and malign black magic which shape the works of Edward Bulwer Lytton and Thomas Hardy, 'The Ring of Thoth' depicts the haunting presence of a man trapped in an ancient 'life-in-death'.⁷⁵⁰ Suffering the torment of being neither fully living nor dead, the Egyptian suffers for his unnatural immortality. Indeed, the narrative questions whether the man has 'become half a mummy himself', noting his almost skeletal appearance, his deathly face 'as glazed and shiny as varnished parchment' with 'no suggestion of pores. One could not fancy a drop of moisture upon that arid surface [...] cross-hatched by a million delicate wrinkles' (p. 143). Coinciding with Conan Doyle's fledgling interest in the spiritualist claims of the continuation of the human soul after death – which would transform Conan Doyle into a missionary for this alternative religion in the early 1900s – 'The Ring of Thoth' (1890) explores a different issue of the soul trapped in a form of living death which even the ancient Egyptian priest of Thoth seems powerless to escape.

At one level 'The Ring of Thoth' foregrounds the power of Sosra's misguided exploitation of his knowledge in order to achieve immortality. Yet, underlying this simple plot is an unnerving esoteric element. Similarly to the Victorian theosophist's

⁷⁴⁹ Cowie, *The Mummy in Fact*, p. 154.

⁷⁵⁰ Jones, *Conan Doyle and the Spirits*, p. 73.

claims of understanding and harnessing Eastern religious powers, Conan Doyle's story emphasises the power of ancient rituals and worship as well as their manipulation and abuse. Significantly, as soon as he discovers Vansittart Smith secretly watching his mummy unwrapping, Sosra immediately condemns the Egyptologist for his 'contemptible' knowledge of this ancient empire, claiming that the 'whole keystone of our old life in Egypt was [...] our hermetic philosophy and mystic knowledge' (p. 146): esoteric spirituality rather than the secular is paramount to this ancient civilisation. Coinciding with Sosra's mysterious religious wisdom, moreover, is his insistence upon the 'mystic arts' which the 'great temple of Abaris' (p. 148) had instilled in him.

As the narrative resists defining the 'mystic arts' it becomes apparent that metaphysical aspects of this religion do not always have a clear explanation. Recollecting his rigorous training to become a priest of Thoth, Sosra proudly declares, 'I had learned all which the wisest priests could teach me. From that time on I studied Nature's secrets for myself, and shared my knowledge with no man' (p. 149). An air of secrecy shrouds his worship as the language suggests that a darkly unorthodox aspect of Sosra's 'mystic arts' have consumed the young priest. He delves ever deeper into the non-spiritual elements of his religion, experimenting with herbs and medicine while questioning what he terms as 'the nature of life' (p. 149). In effect, therefore, the Egyptian explores the powers of medicine to control the human body, creating an elixir of immortality with his cocktail of herbs and esoteric knowledge. Yet, unexpectedly, this priest of Thoth distances himself from both religion and the supernatural, admitting that '[t]here was nothing of mystery or magic in the matter. It

was simply a chemical discovery' (p. 149). Similarly to Edward Bulwer Lytton's 1846 presentation of the immortal herbalist Zanoni, therefore, Conan Doyle's Egyptian priest also manipulates the power of plants to perform seemingly supernatural feats. As Brenda Mann Hammack observes, Sosra has taken on the role of the 'chemically altered',⁷⁵¹ individual: science, rather than magic, superstition or religion, becomes the source of power in controlling the body and defying death.

Consequently, 'The Ring of Thoth' undermines its superficial appearance as a straightforward occult narrative, self-consciously moving away from the supernatural towards a rationally scientific explanation of events: herbs, chemicals and the unknown power of medicine are the reasons for Sosra's apparently preternatural existence. Yet there is another framework co-existing alongside Conan Doyle's presentation of ancient Egyptian science: subtle references to contentious late-nineteenth century scientific debates disrupt the narrative. For example, prior to Sosra's confession about his immortality, Vansittart Smith is unable to comprehend the Egyptian's strange appearance. Pondering the attendant's disconcerting eyes, Vansittart Smith goes on to say that "[t]here is something saurian about them, something reptilian. There's the membrane nictitans of the snakes," he mused, bethinking himself of his zoological studies' (p. 144). Sosra is described in almost prehistoric terms: he is indefinable, neither human nor animal but 'saurian' – some form of missing link between ancient dinosaurs and modern reptiles. Vansittart Smith is drawing upon his zoological studies, searching for a discourse in which to locate and describe this strange being and, so looks towards an evolutionary framework for answers. It seems that Conan Doyle is alluding to *fin de siècle* anxieties concerning

⁷⁵¹ Hammack, 'Phantastica', p. 83.

the regression of species.⁷⁵² The 1895 publication of Max Nordau's *Degeneration* was arguably a culmination of these anxieties, which had gained impetus throughout the 1880s and 1890s.⁷⁵³ With regard to the literature of the period, Glennis Byron discusses how 'the discourse of degeneration articulates much the same fears and anxieties as those traditionally found in the Gothic novel' emphasising how 'concerns about national, social and psychic decay began to multiply in late Victorian Britain' and were reflected in *fin de siècle* Gothic literature.⁷⁵⁴ 'The Ring of Thoth' occurs in the same context as many other Gothic texts which subtly allude to the issues of species degeneration, such as Richard March's *The Beetle* (1890) and Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1891).⁷⁵⁵ Conan Doyle's short story emphasises how scientific rationality is not completely relinquished: a herbal remedy is used to explain the preternatural elements. Although Arthur Conan Doyle's own medical training at Edinburgh University obviously informs 'The Ring of Thoth', the issue of eternal life or life after death – which would later culminate in his passion for spiritualism – is already

⁷⁵² In the aftermath of Charles Darwin's 1859 theory of species development by natural selection, there were concerns regarding the possibility of species degeneration and the future of human civilisation: the fear that species could devolve as easily as they could evolve haunted late-Victorian society. Moreover, on a basic level, the *fin de siècle* is the decade directly before and directly after the turn of the twentieth century. As Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst in 'Introduction' in *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c.1800-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. xii-xxiii explain, '[t]he Victorian *fin de siècle* was an epoch of endings and beginnings. The collision between the old and the new that characterized the turn of the century marks it as an excitingly volatile and transitional period; a time when British cultural politics were caught between two ages, the Victorian and the Modern' (p. xii).

⁷⁵³ As Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst note, Max Nordau claimed that 'all suns and stars are gradually waning, and mankind with all its institutions and creations is persistently in the midst of a dying world'. See Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c.1800-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 1.

⁷⁵⁴ Glennis Byron, 'Gothic in the 1890s' in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 132-41 (p. 132).

⁷⁵⁵ For further information on this aspect of these works see, for example, Julian Wolfreys 'Introduction' in *The Beetle* (Plymouth: Broadview, 2004), pp. 9-34. This edition also has an excellent selection of appendices which range from contemporary reports into *fin de siècle* London to analysis of the New Woman. For an analysis of both *The Beetle* and *Dracula* see Aviva Briefel's 'Hands of Beauty, Hands of Horror: Fear and Egyptian Art at the *Fin de Siècle*', *Victorian Studies*, n.s. 50:2 (Winter 2008), pp. 263-71. It is also interesting that the issue of degeneration is addressed in other works by Arthur Conan Doyle, perhaps most notably in his Sherlock Holmes story, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. For a detailed analysis see, for example, Nils Claussøn's 'Degeneration, *fin-de-siècle* Gothic, and the Science of Detection: Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the Emergence of the Modern Detective Story', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, n.s. 35:1 (2005), pp. 60-87.

present in Conan Doyle's depiction of ancient Egyptian mummies and immortal priests. But his second Egyptian short story, 'Lot No. 249' (1892), lacks the earlier story's level of scientific rationality and the ancient Egyptian threat moves from Paris into the heart of the British Empire.

(iii)

Sold to *Harper's Magazine* for £57 8s 9d⁷⁵⁶ in 1892, the novella 'Lot No. 249' is, as Gary Hoppenstand observes, 'considered by aficionados of dark fantasy to be the finest example of the mummy horror story ever written'.⁷⁵⁷ Concerned with a malevolent and destructive aspect of Ancient Egyptian magic, it seems that the two year interim between the publications of 'The Ring of Thoth' and 'Lot No. 249' saw Arthur Conan Doyle develop a more lurid narrative style in what Kevin I. Jones calls 'another foray into the occult'.⁷⁵⁸ The plot focuses on four medical students – the protagonist Abercrombie Smith, his close friend Jephro Hastie, William Monkhouse Lee and the bad-tempered and eccentric Edward Bellingham, who are all studying at the University of Oxford, an institution which the narrator describes as the 'centre of learning and light'.⁷⁵⁹ Disturbed one night by Bellingham's 'shriek of horror which chilled [...] [the] blood' (p. 114), Smith and Hastie burst into their neighbour's room to find him collapsed on the floor amid his strange collection of Ancient Egyptian relics: a crocodile, carved images of half-man half-animal deities and a 'horrid, black, withered' (p. 115) mummy adorn his study. When Bellingham eventually regains

⁷⁵⁶ Booth, *The Doctor*, p. 166.

⁷⁵⁷ Gary Hoppenstand, 'Horror and Humour: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "When the World Screamed"', *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humour*, n.s. 19:1-2 (1999), pp. 52-62 (p. 52).

⁷⁵⁸ Jones, *Conan Doyle and the Spirits*, p. 76.

⁷⁵⁹ Arthur Conan Doyle, 'Lot No. 249' in *Late Victorian Gothic Tales*, ed. Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 109-40. All further references to 'Lot No. 249' are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis.

consciousness he brushes aside the incident, choosing instead to discuss his new unnamed mummy and explaining how the auction label of 'Lot 249 is all the title he has now' (p. 117).

In the weeks following Bellingham's unexplained shock, his eccentricities intensify: he talks to himself late at night and unusual noises are often heard coming from his unoccupied room. In addition to his own oddities, what is described as Bellingham's 'malignant passion' (p. 124) towards other students becomes apparent; coincidentally his enemies all fall victim to an inhuman attacker. Abercrombie Smith's suspicion is finally roused when he passes Bellingham's room to find the mummy inexplicably absent. In horror he confronts Bellingham, accusing his fellow student of abusing some form of supernatural power to reanimate the mummy and use it as a weapon. But his own life is also now in danger as Bellingham directs the fearsome mummy to hunt down Smith who, in desperation, flees to the safety of a friend's house. 'Lot No. 249' concludes when Smith and Hastie hold Bellingham at gunpoint, forcing the man to cut up and burn the mummy along with all of his Egyptian papyri which contain the magical incantations. By the time 'Lot No. 249' was published, the public obsession with mummies and the Egyptian afterlife was already well established. As Roger Luckhurst explains, this short story is just 'one of the many mummy tales that began to emerge in the late Victorian era',⁷⁶⁰ after strained relations with the Egyptian government culminated in British military occupation in 1882 and the subsequent plundering and the relocating in London of many of its

⁷⁶⁰ Luckhurst, 'Introduction', p. xxvii.

ancient relics.⁷⁶¹ Perhaps surprisingly, however, in spite of his self-confessed attraction to Ancient Egyptian spirituality, his interest in psychic phenomena and their evident influence upon his writings, a thread of scientific rationality can still be traced even in the supernatural tale, 'Lot No. 249'.

The text's most obvious use of science is its positioning of the main characters as medical students at the University of Oxford. Immediately, then, an atmosphere of scientific rationality prevails: the narrator emphasises Abercrombie Smith's studious nature, explaining how a 'litter of medical books upon the table, with scattered bones, models and anatomical plates, pointed to the extent [...] of his studies' (p. 110): he is committed to learning about the effect of medicine upon the human body, dedicating time and energy to understanding its complexities. Lesli J. Favor reiterates this aspect, noting how 'Conan Doyle constructs Abercrombie Smith as studious, manly, dutiful, and above all, scientific. Like Sherlock Holmes, he smokes a pipe [...] and like his creator, he studies medicine'.⁷⁶² Additionally, when Smith and Hastie find the unconscious Bellingham they discuss his treatment, relying upon their medical knowledge for solutions before suggesting the use of a 'nerve tonic' or a 'course of electricity' (p. 19) as a remedy for his current distress. But it is Smith's reaction to reports of an inhuman attacker who is terrorising the University which is most significant. After being told that the victim 'swears that it [the attacker] was not human, and indeed, from the scratches on his throat, I should be inclined to agree with

⁷⁶¹ Conan Doyle continued to take an interest in Egypt after the publication of his two famous mummy narratives. Yumna Siddiqi in 'The Cesspool of Empire: Sherlock Holmes and the Return of the Repressed', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, n.s. 34:1 (March 2006), pp. 233-47 observes that Conan Doyle 'travelled to Cairo in late 1895 [...] and quite by chance found himself near the spot when Kitchener began his campaign to retake Khartoum' and, as a result, an enthusiastic Conan Doyle 'rushed to the frontlines in the capacity of honorary journalist' (p. 234).

⁷⁶² Lesli J. Favor, 'The Foreign and the Female in Arthur Conan Doyle: Beneath the Candy Coating', *English Literature in Transition*, n.s. 43:4 (2000), pp. 398-409 (p. 406).

him', Abercrombie Smith immediately rejects such a claim, displaying 'scientific contempt' at such a notion before sarcastically declaring 'what, then? Have we come down to spooks?' (p. 123). Smith looks for a logical explanation, scorning any suggestion that the supernatural may have some part to play and implying that superstitious minds have simply overreacted. However, the preternatural aspects of the attacks do not subside: a degree of doubt haunts the rational-minded Abercrombie Smith as he begins to realise that something inexplicable may be at the root of the events. Similarly to Conan Doyle's scientific hero Sherlock Holmes, therefore, Smith must piece together all of the clues, drawing them together in order to solve the mystery and restore order. But, inevitably, Smith's conclusion has supernatural elements: '[w]hat had been a dim suspicion, a vague, fantastic conjecture, had suddenly taken form [...] how monstrous it was [...] how entirely beyond all bounds of human experience' (p. 131). The unthinkable reality is that Ancient Egyptian magic has restored the horrifying mummy to life. Abercrombie Smith completely accepts this supernatural revivification, abandoning any hint of scientific materialism before reacting to the problem. There is a sense, then, that the narrative encourages this type of supernatural acceptance: the unknown mysteries of Ancient Egyptian magic are presented as having an unfathomable but credible power.

The instigator of the mummy's reawakening is Edward Bellingham. Described as having 'a strange and most repellent face', his personality corresponds with his unattractive appearance: Hastie emphasises how '[h]e looks beastly. And he has a beastly temper, a venomous temper' (p. 112). Further referred to as a 'demon' at 'Eastern languages' (p. 111), the oddly eccentric Bellingham lives in 'a museum

rather than a study' which is cluttered with ancient relics covering 'every niche and shelf' (p. 114), displaying similarities with the setting of the immortal Egyptian attendant in Conan Doyle's earlier story, 'The Ring of Thoth' and positioning Bellingham as the natural outsider – his medical studies are incidental in comparison with his passion for Egyptology. His obsession with gaining knowledge and understanding of the ancient past leads Bellingham towards darker secrets. Although he explains how he has 'unwrapped mummies before' (p. 118), Bellingham is not content with a common parlour game and anthropological study. He transforms the unwrapped mummified corpse into an item of furniture, displaying its unwrapped shrivelled bones in his study: 'two little nut-like eyes still lurked in the [...] hollow sockets. The blotched skin was drawn tightly from bone to bone, and a tangled wrap of black coarse hair fell over the ears' (p. 117). Death and decay fill this image, revealing something repellent in Bellingham's unconventional hobby: in contrast to his medical training, aimed at healing the human body, he delights in displaying the grotesque aspects of bodily destruction.

Disconcertingly, however, Bellingham's oddities do not stop at his obsession with the mummified corpse. Delving into the mysteries of Egyptian magic, the amateur Egyptologist uncovers the secret of reviving the dead, blurring the boundaries between life and death in practicing his new-found art on the withered mummy before using the undead creature like a witch's familiar. Indeed, Abercrombie Smith compares Bellingham's actions to European witchcraft, angrily declaring that 'they have given up burning folk like you' before warning him that his 'filthy Egyptian

tricks won't answer in England' (p. 132).⁷⁶³ In contrast to 'The Ring of Thoth', however, 'Lot No. 249' uses magical control over life and death for evil purposes: the undead mummy acts as both a witch's agent of evil and as a form of haunting ghoul, silently terrorising his victims before disappearing from view. Eventually Bellingham's mummified weapon is sent to destroy Smith:

It moved in the shadow of the hedge, silently and furtively, a dark crouching figure, dimly visible against the black background [...] Out of the darkness he had a glimpse of a scraggy neck, and of two eyes that will ever haunt him [...] this horror was bounding like a tiger at his heels, with blazing eyes and one stringy arm out-thrown. (p. 133)

The mummy is depicted in both predatory and degenerate terms: it is an ancient and indefinable hunter who uses the darkness to cloak its deadly mission before ruthlessly closing in upon its prey. The language hints that reverse evolution has created an inhuman enemy which is poised somewhere between mankind and animal: established boundaries blur, unsettling the reader and emphasising the non-human power of the mummy. Furthermore, after Smith escapes this terrifying encounter, he says that a 'decent Christian would have nothing to do with such a business' (p. 135). Significantly, then, this is a non-Christian, animalistic foreign enemy haunting a university which is at the very heart of British rationality.

Ultimately, however, Bellingham's malevolent creature could not have been resurrected without the Egyptian incantation. These magical words control the events of the narrative, suggesting that Bellingham is powerless without this esoteric Eastern knowledge. Desperately trying to decipher the mystery surrounding the mummy,

⁷⁶³ David Pickering in *Dictionary of Witchcraft* explains how 'the conventional method of disposing of condemned witches was death by burning at the stake [...] experts upon the subject consistently stressed the need to destroy the victims' bodies completely, lest their magic power be passed on' (p. 77).

Abercrombie Smith confides in his friend, Doctor Peterson, who concludes that Bellingham, 'in his Eastern studies, has got hold of some infernal secret by which a mummy [...] can be [...] brought to life. He was trying this disgusting business on the night when he fainted' (p. 134). Magic was an integral part of Ancient Egyptian religion and culture: used for healing, to control emotion, as a form of communication with the gods and for protection in both life and death, spells were a feature of Egyptian society. But in 'Lot No. 249' and 'The Ring of Thoth', however, this supernatural element is twisted. Indeed, both texts manipulate the newly acquired Victorian understanding of Ancient Egypt, inverting Egyptological advancements in interpreting *The Book of the Dead* and using it for a sensational effect in the narratives. Similarly to 'The Ring of Thoth', moreover, 'Lot No. 249' draws attention to the Ancient Egyptian use of herbs with Bellingham referring to his knowledge of 'the sacred plant – the plant of the priests' (p. 117). But, unlike in 'The Ring of Thoth', this reference to herbalism is never developed in 'Lot No. 249', the emphasis is on the narrative's allusion to the magical, rather than scientific, aspects of Egyptology. When Smith confronts Bellingham and destroys not only the mummy but the scroll of magical incantations, Bellingham desperately cries '[d]on't burn that! Why man, you don't know what you do. It is unique; it contains wisdom which is nowhere else to be found' (p. 139). The unknown power of an ancient non-Christian civilisation intrudes into Victorian society: what lies beneath the preserved surface of the mummified body is never fixed or stable as a form of life in death continues to haunt the narrative. Unable to comprehend this ancient form of supernatural terror, therefore, Smith must destroy it: like a Christian heretic, the mummy and the magic spells are burnt so that the evil is exorcised and rationalised order can be restored.

While ‘The Ring of Thoth’ (1890) explores the use of Ancient Egyptian medicine to achieve immortality, ‘Lot No. 249’ (1892) focuses on the power of esoteric Egyptian magic and its ability to bring the dead back to life. Yet, importantly, both narratives foreground the possibility of preservation of or the regaining of some form of life after death, addressing the way in which the ancient past intrudes upon the living present. Consequently, the texts seem to be working on two levels. At one level Conan Doyle uses a Gothic technique to create a story of suspense and mystery. But there is a sinister undertone. The non-Christian aspects unsettle both narratives and the blurring of the boundaries between life and death creates an unusual type of haunting presence. ‘Lot No. 249’ is the more extreme narrative, refusing to offer the reader a scientific or medical explanation for the undead mummy and suggesting the fallibility of the protagonists medical and scientific knowledge.

Conan Doyle’s increasing fascination with spiritualist philosophies – and the movement’s insistence upon the continuation of the spirit after death – is reflected in both his mummy narratives while simultaneously subscribing to the period’s fascination with Egyptology. The next section of this chapter will explore the work of the little-known Welsh author, Arthur Machen (1863-1947) – a man who, as Mark Valentine states, ‘Conan Doyle called [...] a genius’.⁷⁶⁴ Indeed, Conan Doyle borrowed a copy of Machen’s occult work, *The Three Impostors* (1895), from his friend Jerome K. Jerome, and commented that ‘[y]our pal Machen is a genius right enough [...] but I don’t take him to bed with me’.⁷⁶⁵ Conan Doyle’s admiration of the

⁷⁶⁴ Mark Valentine, *Arthur Machen* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1995), p. 7. Significantly, this relationship and admiration between Conan Doyle and Machen remains largely unexplored and poorly documented: only Mark Valentine’s biography briefly draws attention to the connection without detailing the original source.

⁷⁶⁵ Jerome K. Jerome, *My Life and Times* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, [n.d]), p. 116. Jerome K. Jerome (1850 – 1927) was a novelist and playwright whose works included humorous sketches

darkly supernatural content of Machen's work is clearly established. In addition to the unreserved praise which Conan Doyle offered for Machen's controversial, and often unpopular, works, the biographical similarities between these two men encourage a juxtaposition of their fiction. The Celtic origins of these authors – Conan Doyle's Irish descent and Machen's Welsh heritage – offers a different literary and historical perspective, distanced from the rationality of orthodox Christianity and akin to the world of ancient pre-Christian spirituality.⁷⁶⁶ While this Celtic connection is a fundamentally British element, what is important is that both these authors had an early affiliation with some form of ancient esoteric pre-Christianity which later developed into a more intense exploration of ancient Eastern spirituality. Subtle parallels between these two authors are further evident as Machen, like Conan Doyle, chose the short story form as a mode of expressing his interest in ancient occult powers. Moreover, similarly to Catherine Crowe's obscure early-Victorian short tales of psychic phenomena, collected in *The Night Side of Nature* (1848), Machen's later Gothic novella, *The Great God Pan* (1894), is linked to Crowe in its obscurity but, significantly, it manipulates these early preoccupations and takes a new turn. Similarly to Conan Doyle's portrayal of an ancient Egyptian threat to late-Victorian British society in 'Lot No. 249', Machen's *The Great God Pan* positions esoteric religious knowledge as capable of destroying modern civilisation. While contemporary works such as H. Rider Haggard's *Cleopatra* (1889) and Bram Stoker's

published as *On the Stage—and Off* (1885), a collection of essays *The Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow* (1886) and the comic *Three Men in a Boat* (1889). For further information see, for example, Damian Atkinson, 'Jerome, Jerome Klapka (1859–1927)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: Sept 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/34183> [accessed 18 March 2010]

⁷⁶⁶ Darryl Jones's 'Borderlands: Spiritualism and the Occult in *fin de siècle* and Edwardian Welsh and Irish Horror' in *Irish Studies Review*, n.s. 17:1, pp. 31–44 briefly touches upon Arthur Machen's Welsh connections, suggesting that they play a role in creating the horror elements of his fiction before comparing Machen and other Celtic authors with early horror films.

The Jewel of Seven Stars (1903)⁷⁶⁷ are perhaps more obvious examples of Egyptian narratives, it is the Celtic connection as well as Conan Doyle's admiration of Machen which, although scarcely documented, is important to this thesis. Yet, the *fin de siècle* narrative of Arthur Machen goes some way further in reflecting the attitudes and interests of a society concerned with both the non-Christian afterlife and the way in which the supernatural intrudes upon a late-Victorian society which, on the surface, claimed to be the centre of rationality and technological advancements.

⁷⁶⁷ H. Rider Haggard's *Cleopatra: Being an Account of the Fall and Vengeance of Harmachis* (1889) is told from the point of view of an Egyptian priest, tracing the treachery and power of the Egyptian ruler Cleopatra while Bram Stoker's *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903) focuses on an archaeologist's attempt to bring an ancient mummy back to life.

III - Arthur Machen

(i)

Arthur Llewelyn Jones Machen (1863-1947) was born on 3 March 1863 in Caerleon, Monmouthshire to Welsh parents, Janet Robina Machen (1826-85) and the Reverend John Edward Jones (1831-87) of Llanddewi Fach rectory. With this religious background, Machen's formal education was at a Church school. From 1874 to 1880, he attended the nearby Hereford Cathedral School, which instilled in this young boy the principles of the Anglican Church. However, like his predecessors and contemporaries, Edward Bulwer Lytton, George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and Arthur Conan Doyle, Machen's religious brief proved to be far from straightforward. Unsurprisingly, like many Victorians coming to terms with a post-Darwinian world, he suffered a crisis of faith early in his adult life. Wesley D. Sweetser suggests that Machen:

rebelled from religion for a period during the 1880s and 1890s, as had his first wife, who had deserted the Roman Catholic Church. Nonetheless, on her death-bed, she returned to the fold. Machen himself [...] ultimately came to accept the faith of his father – Catholicism within the Anglican Church but tinged with Welsh mysticism.⁷⁶⁸

Although the causes of Machen's decade-long rebellion are unclear, there is nevertheless a clear sense that Machen resented conforming to a fixed religious identity, instead preferring to combine elements of Catholicism and the Celtic spirit to make his own individual type of Christianity.⁷⁶⁹ As Mark Valentine notes, the 'Celtic Church was for Machen the great lost cause' before explaining that 'he found in the

⁷⁶⁸ Wesley D. Sweetser, *Arthur Machen* (New York: Twayne, 1964), p. 58.

⁷⁶⁹ For further information on the influence of Celtic mythology on Arthur Machen's work see, for example, Sage Leslie-McCarthy's 'Re-Vitalising the Little People: Arthur Machen's Tales of the Remnant Races', *Australasian Victorian Studies Journal*, n.s. 11 (2005), pp. 65-78. Another interesting work which explores Machen and Celticism, focusing predominantly on the occult aspects, is Terence Brown's 'Cultural Nationalism, Celticism and the Occult' in *Celticism*, ed. Terence Brown (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), pp. 221-30.

legends surrounding the saints of the early British church the validation of his own deeply felt conviction that Christianity is “the greatest of all Mystery Religions”.⁷⁷⁰ The mystical unknown seemed to fascinate Machen, informing his fiction and influencing his Christianity. Moreover, referring to his hometown as ‘shining, beautiful, a little white city in a dream’,⁷⁷¹ Machen’s happy childhood and love of the Welsh landscape is frequently reflected in his fictional writings: as Iain S. Smith observes, ‘[t]hough he rarely returned to the haunted landscapes of his youth, they were to remain a life-long source of wonder’.⁷⁷² Later, reflecting upon his boyhood surroundings, Machen foregrounds not only Caerleon’s Roman remains, but also the ‘prehistoric tumulus’⁷⁷³ which, like Egdon Heath in Thomas Hardy’s Wessex, shaped the Monmouthshire landscape as well as Machen’s imagination: the ancient past intrudes upon the present in the topography of the area. Indeed, the captivating countryside coupled with what Roger Dobson terms as Machen’s ‘passion for romantic literature’ inspired the young man’s first venture into the world of writing with his ‘mystical poem’, *Eleusinia* (1881).⁷⁷⁴ Yet, at this point Machen’s family poverty – the agricultural crash of 1880 had a direct effect upon the parishioners of the Llanddewi Fach rectory and so Machen’s father was forced to declare himself bankrupt – prevented him from attending university so Machen instead pursued his dreams of becoming a writer and a journalist, leaving his beloved Wales behind and moving to London in 1881.

⁷⁷⁰ Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, pp. 90-91.

⁷⁷¹ Arthur Machen, *Things Near and Far* (London: Martin Secker, 1926), p. 8.

⁷⁷² Iain S. Smith, ‘Foreword’ in *The Great God Pan* (London: Creation Press, 1993), pp. 4-10 (p. 4).

⁷⁷³ Machen, *Near and Far*, p. 7.

⁷⁷⁴ Roger Dobson, ‘Machen, Arthur Llewelyn Jones (1863–1947)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37711> [accessed 10 Oct 2009].

Machen's dream of becoming a respected literary figure, like his hero Charles Dickens, was fraught with disappointments.⁷⁷⁵ After relocating to London, and while struggling to adapt to his new existence away from the Welsh landscape, Machen's first employment in the bustling metropolis was as a publisher's clerk.⁷⁷⁶ Although Machen reflected that 'I was glad indeed at the prospect of doing something for myself and so removing a little from the weary burden at the rectory',⁷⁷⁷ his new life was lonely. While living in isolated poverty, however, he still managed to publish *The Anatomy of Tobacco* (1884), a complete translation of *The Heptameron* (1886) and *The Chronicle of Clemendy* (1888), giving the aspiring author entry into the literary world. It was during this time that Machen met and married Amelia 'Amy' Hogg on 31 August 1887, after falling in love with her. Importantly, it was also during this period, in 1885, that Machen undertook the role of cataloguing a vast array of esoteric occult works for his publisher, George Redway. As Mark Valentine notes, this 'only steeped him [Machen] more deeply in strange knowledge, for he was called upon to dip into, and give some description of, each book'.⁷⁷⁸ Again, Machen comments extensively on what was expected of him in this new-found role:

Here were books about Witchcraft, Diabolical Possession, "Fascination," or the Evil Eye; [...] the Kabbala. Ghosts and Apparitions were a large family, Secret Societies of all sorts hung on the skirts of the Rosicrucians and Freemasons, and so found a place in the collection. [...] Then [...] the ancients; and beside them were the modern throng of Diviners and Stargazers and Psychometrists and Animal Magnetists and Mesmerisms and Spiritualist and Psychic Researchers.⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁵ Iain S. Smith's 'Foreword', p. 4 also notes that Arthur Machen's other literary heroes were Thomas de Quincey and Rabelais.

⁷⁷⁶ For a further analysis on Arthur Machen's London experience see, for example, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's 'The Enchanted City: Arthur Machen and Locality: Scenes from his Early London Years (1880-85)', *Durham University Journal*, n.s. 56:2 (1995), pp. 301-13.

⁷⁷⁷ Machen, *Near and Far*, p. 15.

⁷⁷⁸ Valentine, *Arthur Machen*, p. 16.

⁷⁷⁹ Machen, *Near and Far*, p. 16.

Like Conan Doyle, Machen became an expert in various aspects of psychic research and mysticism. Yet, there were darker occult elements which he was expected to explore and, as William Charlton and Aidan Reynolds explain, ‘he penetrated further into black magic than most’.⁷⁸⁰ Witchcraft, possession and esoteric religious societies in addition to pseudo-sciences such as spiritualism and mesmerism were Machen’s topic of study. According to Sweetser, the books which Machen read during this period included:

besides Jennings’ *Rosicrucians* [...] Waites’s *Real History of the Rosicrucians, Doctrines and Literature of the Kabbalah, and The Hidden Church of the Holy Graal*; Blavatsky’s *Secret Doctrine*; Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* [...] He probably also read Blavatsky’s *Isis Unveiled* [...] and Waite’s *Book of Black Magic*.⁷⁸¹

To an imagination already prone to dreaming up mystical stories about his Celtic homeland and the ancient relics which characterised his Monmouthshire home, this research into the occult would shape not only Machen’s works of fiction but also his personal life.

A turning point in Machen’s life came, as it had for Conan Doyle, on 31 July 1899 with the death of Machen’s beloved wife Amy, from cancer. Depressed, alone and consumed by despair that his literary dreams at 36 years of age were still unrealised, Machen sought solace in unexpected places in what Christopher Palmer calls ‘an attempt to alleviate [...] his “horror of soul”’.⁷⁸² Machen had previously met and formed a long-lasting friendship with the historian of occultism and avid

⁷⁸⁰ William Charlton and Aidan Reynolds, *Arthur Machen: A Short Account of his Life and Work* (London: The Richards Press, 1963), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁸¹ Sweetser, *Arthur Machen*, pp. 90-91.

⁷⁸² Christopher Palmer, ‘Introduction’ in *The Collected Arthur Machen*, ed. Christopher Palmer (London: Duckworth, 1988), pp. 1-22 (p. 13).

spiritualist, Arthur Edward Waite (1837-1942). In January 1887, this unconventional man 'pulled Machen back from the brink of self-destructive despair after Amy's death'⁷⁸³ by encouraging him to explore the mysterious world of secret societies. Waite's own enthusiasm for the occult had led him to join the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in 1891 and Machen followed suit eight years later. On 21 November 1899, two months after Amy's death, Machen was initiated into the Order of the Golden Dawn and given the name *Frater Avallaunius*. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was founded in 1887 by three Freemasons, William Robert Woodman (1828-91), William Wynn Westcott (1848-1925) and Samuel Liddell MacGregor (1854-1918). R. A. Gilbert explains that the Order was 'based upon the precepts and practices of the Rosicrucians of the seventeenth century, [...] members were required to follow a disciplined course of study' on topics such as 'Alchemy, the Qabalah, Gnosticism, the Mystery Religions and Egyptian traditions'⁷⁸⁴ as well as the magical practises of the French magician Éliphas Lévi (1810-75), an acquaintance of Edward Bulwer Lytton.⁷⁸⁵ With its display of ritual and strict guidelines about the conduct of its members, the Order of the Golden Dawn seemed, like spiritualism and theosophy, to act as a substitute religion for what Janet Oppenheim terms as the 'refugees from Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century'.⁷⁸⁶ Mary K. Greer

⁷⁸³ Godfrey Brangham, Roger Dobson and R. A. Gilbert, 'A. E. Waite: Introduction' in *Arthur Machen Selected Letters: The Private Writings of the Master of the Macabre* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1988), pp. 25-28 (p. 26).

⁷⁸⁴ R. A. Gilbert, 'Preface to the *Collectanea Hermetica Series*' in Florence Farr, *Egyptian Magic: An Essay on the Nature and Applications of Magical Practices in Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt* (Wellinbrough: The Aquarian Press, 1982), p. v (p. v). For further general information on The Order of the Golden Dawn see R. A. Gilbert's 'The Quest of the Golden Dawn: A Cautionary Tale', *Cauda Pavonis: Studies in Hermeticism*, n.s. 8:1 (Spring 1989), pp. 4-7; Alex Owen's *The Place of Enchantment: British Occultism and the Culture of the Modern* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004); Mark S. Morrisson's 'The Periodical Culture of the Occult Revival: Esoteric Wisdom, Modernity and Counter-Public Spheres', *Journal of Modern Literature*, n.s. 31:2 (Winter 2008), pp. 1-23 and R. A. Gilbert's 'Magical Manuscripts: An Introduction to the Archives of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn', *Yeats Annual*, n.s. 5 (1987), pp. 163-77.

⁷⁸⁵ Wolff, *Strange Stories*, p. 260. Wolff notes that Bulwer Lytton met Lévi soon after his 1854 arrival in England.

⁷⁸⁶ Oppenheim, *The Other World*, p. 159.

emphasises the Order's religious elements, explaining how it 'provided both the knowledge and the medium through which they [its members] could transmute their vital life force [...] in order to commune with planetary spirits, angels and gods'.⁷⁸⁷ Echoing Conan Doyle's break with Catholicism and affinity with esoteric ancient religions before his eventual alignment with spiritualism, therefore, Machen's life story followed a similar trend. In the decades when his Christian faith faltered, he joined the community of literary men and women who were drawn towards both the quasi-religious and magical elements of an Order which offered ancient mystical solutions about life after death to a society in flux.

Machen's attraction towards this esoteric Order was not uncommon in the Victorian literary world, especially amongst Celtic authors: a trend for engaging with the suggestively religious elements of theosophy, spiritualism and hermetic Orders quickly emerged. One of the most famous literary members of the Order of the Golden Dawn was the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939).⁷⁸⁸ Similarly to Machen and Conan Doyle, Yeats's Celtic background seemed to pave the way for an investigation into other kinds of pre-Christian spirituality. Yeats was initiated into the secret society, under the name *Demon Est Deus Inversus* on 7 March 1890 but had already been, as R. F. Foster explains, 'interested in various exotic and mystical theories and ideas of spiritual life [...] [such as] Indian philosophy',⁷⁸⁹ whilst at school

⁷⁸⁷ Mary K. Greer, *Women of the Golden Dawn: Rebels and Priestesses* (Rochester: Park Street Press, 1995), p. 57.

⁷⁸⁸ Another noted literary figure who was initiated in The Order of the Golden Dawn was the Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950). For further information on his biography see, for example, Arthur F. Ganz's *George Bernard Shaw* (London: Macmillan, 1983).

⁷⁸⁹ R. F. Foster, 'Yeats, William Butler (1865-1939)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37061> [accessed 11 Oct 2009].

in Dublin.⁷⁹⁰ It was through the Golden Dawn that Yeats met and fell in love with the unconventional actress and occultist Florence Farr (1860-1917). Passionate about the Ancient Egyptian elements of the secret society – the founder of the Egyptian Lodge within the Order, Wallis Budge, was also a respected Egyptologist – Farr extensively researched the magical religious rituals of this civilisation, publishing her own work, *Egyptian Magic: An Essay on the Nature and Applications of Magical Practices in Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt* (1892) shortly after her 1890 initiation into the Order under the name *Spaientia Sapienti Dona Data*.⁷⁹¹ Like the mystical writings of theosophy and the mid-Victorian archaeological boom – which strived to understand the supernatural dimension of ancient civilisations – so too the Order of the Golden Dawn advocated a magical, religious element. In addition to giving examples of spells, Farr's work into Egyptian sorcery also dissected the ritual of magic, arguing that 'it is very easy to see that a great part of Egyptian Magic lay in a species of

⁷⁹⁰ Significantly, his father's decision to move from Dublin to London in order to become a portrait painter immersed this impressionable young man in the bohemian culture of London: his acquaintances soon included the Dublin-born novelist Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and the Pre-Raphaelite artist William Morris (1834-96). More specifically with regard to his occult interests, Yeats's 1890 initiation into the Order was the beginning of his life-long research into ancient magic and mysticism. R. F. Foster in *W. B. Yeats: A Life I: The Apprentice Mage 1865-1914* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), emphasises Yeats's initial leanings towards theosophy: 'The Golden Dawn followed through [...] [his] interest in ritual magic and study [as] prescribed by Esoteric Theosophists' (p. 103) while George Mills Harper in *Yeats's Golden Dawn* (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1974), observes that 'he was a member of the Golden Dawn or its successors for more than thirty years' (p. 2). Moreover, Ruth Brandon's *The Spiritualists* also explores Yeats's initial attraction to theosophy, explaining how 'Yeats himself witnessed some miracles, or apparent miracles, while in her [Madame Blavatsky's] presence – a picture in the next room was there one moment, gone the next. Madame Blavatsky herself accepted this occurrence in the most matter-of-fact way' (p. 237). For further information on Yeats's involvement in The Order of the Golden Dawn see, for example, Oliver Hennessey's "'I Shall Find the Dark Grow Luminous When I Understand I Have Nothing": Yeats's Failing Vision', *Yeats-Eliot Review*, n.s. 21:2 (Summer 2004), pp. 2-20.

⁷⁹¹ While the book is a pioneering work into the occult practices of Ancient Egypt, it is, as Timothy d'Arch Smith in 'Introduction' in Florence Farr's *Egyptian Magic: An Essay on the Nature and Applications of Magical Practices in Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1982), pp. ix-xvi notes, the text's 'insistence on the efficacy of practical magic' (p. xiii) which is most interesting. For further information on the Egyptian elements of The Order of the Golden Dawn see, for example, Juliette Wood's 'The Celtic Tarot and the Secret Tradition: A Study in Modern Legend Making', *Folklore*, n.s. 109 (1998), pp. 15-25.

Hypnotism, called by later magicians, Enchantment, Fascination, and so forth'.⁷⁹² For Machen, however, the attraction of the Order of the Golden Dawn was not so enduring. Once the society's initial role as a consolation and distraction for the newly inducted and grieving Machen had served its purpose, the Welshman made a decisive break, moving away from serious occult involvement.

While Machen's close friend A. E. Waite's interest in obscure magical practices and societies deepened towards the turn of the twentieth century, Machen felt only disillusionment. In his autobiography, Machen explains that:

I must say that I did not seek the Order merely in quest of odd entertainment. [...] I had experienced strange things—they still appear to me strange—of body, mind and spirit, and I suppose that the Order, dimly heard of, might give me some light and guidance and leading on these matters, But as I have noted, I was mistaken.⁷⁹³

In contrast to Waite, Yeats and Farr, therefore, Machen found little comfort in the Egyptian magic of the Golden Dawn. Yet, this self-conscious distancing from the occult did not mean that Machen was moving towards materialism or scientific rationality: far from it. Again, his autobiography clearly states that 'I am not exactly a fanatical Spiritualist: but I had rather be of the straightest sect of Rappers [...] than [...] [a Spiritualist who] understands all the whole frame and scheme of the universe'.⁷⁹⁴ Although, unlike Conan Doyle, Machen was not a devout spiritualist, his

⁷⁹² Florence Farr, *Egyptian Magic: An Essay on the Nature and Applications of Magical Practices in Pharaonic and Ptolemaic Egypt* (Wellingborough: The Aquarian Press, 1982), p. 11. A more detailed analysis of Florence Farr's life story and her relationship with The Order of the Golden Dawn can be found in Mary K. Greer's *Women of the Golden Dawn* and Sharon E. Cogdill's 'Florence Farr's Sphere Group: The Secret Society within the Golden Dawn', *Cauda Pavonis: Studies in Hermeticism*, n.s. 11:1 (Spring 1992), pp. 7-12.

⁷⁹³ Machen, *Near and Far*, p. 154.

⁷⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 18. His search for personal stability was finally realised when Machen joined Frank Benson's Shakespeare's Repertory Company in 1901 and toured with them as an actor. His new-found happiness was complete when he married Dorothea Purefoy Hudleston (1878-1947), an actress in the

words emphasise an affinity with the movement: Machen's interest in the occult seems to have left him open-minded about the issue of spiritualism. With regard to his literary career, the relative obscurity which Machen had experienced, even after relocating to London, was soon to take an unusual turn: as Roger Dobson notes, '[i]n the 1920s, having been neglected by the British literary establishment for forty years, Machen attracted a coterie of admirers in the United States'.⁷⁹⁵ Indeed, they compared him to Edgar Allan Poe and Nathaniel Hawthorne; Machen was upheld, as Iain S. Smith observes, 'as "The Novelist of Ecstasy and Sin"' while Smith further notes how a 'steady procession of American literati made the pilgrimage to visit him, joining a select band of Bohemians that met regularly'.⁷⁹⁶

But, as with much in Machen's life, this popularity was short-lived and the struggling author spent his final years living quietly in Amersham, Buckinghamshire. In recent years Machen's work has been brought back to life: an Arthur Machen Society was established in America in 1948 while a British equivalent followed suit in 1986. Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894) achieved the most noticeable blend of scandal and success. Its combination of decadent horror, Gothic terror and occult mystery helped earn Machen the title of 'the Master of the Macabre'.⁷⁹⁷ While early- to mid-Victorian works often used the discourse of witchcraft, rural folklore and restless spirits to convey the disconcerting presence of the unknown, Machen, like

Company, on 25 June 1903. She later bore him a son, Hilary (1912-87), and a daughter, Janet (b. 1917). Moreover, from 1910 to 1921 Arthur Machen worked as a journalist for the *Evening News* in London which, in addition to printing his journalistic reports, also published some of his fiction including his famous World War I piece, *The Angel of Mons: The Bowmen and Other Legends of the War* (1915) which originally appeared in the newspaper as 'The Bowmen'.

⁷⁹⁵ Dobson, 'Machen', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37711> [accessed 10 Oct 2009].

⁷⁹⁶ Smith, 'Foreword', p. 9.

⁷⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 10.

Conan Doyle in his mummy fiction, focuses predominantly on ancient esoteric magic and the consequences of the supernatural past invading the supposedly rational world of *fin de siècle* England.

(ii)

Machen's controversial novella, *The Great God Pan* (1894), was his first work to achieve any substantial contemporary success. With a profound knowledge of esoteric occult works – as John Sutherland explains, he 'brought out a collection of fantastic and occult pieces, *Thesaurus Incantatas*'⁷⁹⁸ in 1888 – and in the aftermath of his foray into the Order of the Golden Dawn, Machen combined this profound knowledge with a highly active imagination. Originally, the first chapter of *The Great God Pan* was published as an individual story, 'The Experiment', in the *Whirlwind* in December 1890, but the short story was expanded and developed into an occult novella and published by John Lane at the fashionable The Bodley Head publishing house. The plot opens with a secret experiment in 'transcendental medicine'⁷⁹⁹ by an eccentric Dr. Raymond. The doctor's subject is a foundling called Mary, who is corrupted after being possessed by the Greco-Roman god Pan and descends into madness and idiocy shortly after a dramatic brain operation.⁸⁰⁰ The experiment is carefully watched by Dr. Raymond's friend, Mr. Clarke, who is horrified by the outcome. After the experiment, Mary is taken away but, unbeknown to both the reader and Mr. Clarke, before Mary dies she bears a child, Helen Vaughan, as a consequence of her strange possession by

⁷⁹⁸ Sutherland, *Victorian Fiction*, p. 396.

⁷⁹⁹ Arthur Machen, *The Great God Pan and The Hill of Dreams* (New York: Dover Publications, 2006), p. 9. All further references to *The Great God Pan* are to this edition and given parenthetically in the thesis.

⁸⁰⁰ In Greek and Roman mythology, Pan is depicted as half-man, half-goat who was the god of nature, fertility, forests, wild animals and shepherds. He was also lecherous in nature. See, Lass, Kiremidjian, Goldstein, *Dictionary of Classical and Literary Allusion*, p. 167.

Pan. The unnatural offspring is farmed out by the guilty Dr. Raymond, who wants to disassociate himself from Pan's child. The fragmented narrative then shifts in time and place to the actions of the mysterious Helen Vaughan and her sinister impact upon the inhabitants of a sleepy Gwent village in Wales: her contact with a local village boy drives him to idiocy after he witnesses Helen frolicking with 'a "strange naked man"' (p. 20). While the ambiguous narrative purposely leaves the details of these terrors unspoken, it becomes apparent that an unknown evil haunts Helen Vaughan. The narrative suddenly shifts to London where Mr. Villiers, a friend of Mr. Clarke, has learned that Helen Vaughan has just married the unfortunate Charles Herbert. Although Herbert never reveals what has happened during his marriage, it is clear that Helen has tormented him to the brink of death. Subsequently, Helen disappears from London society, only to re-emerge as the socialite widow Mrs. Beaumont.⁸⁰¹ Again sinister events occur as Villiers discovers that a string of suicides are undoubtedly linked to the unpredictable Mrs. Beaumont. After discussing his concerns with Mr. Clarke, and realising that Mrs. Beaumont's true identity is Helen Vaughan, the two men decide to perform a kind of exorcism, offering the demonically possessed woman a hempen rope by which to hang herself: before their eyes she ends her life, dissolving into a grotesque black lava and changing in gender and form, described as 'neither man nor beast' (p. 62).

Unsurprisingly, *The Great God Pan* sparked controversy when published. Its depiction of an occult-scientific experiment and its mixture of Gothic horror,

⁸⁰¹ Machen's description of Helen Vaughan as a demonic female who haunts and destroys her husband bears a striking resemblance to Arthur Conan Doyle's 1884 short story, 'John Barrington Cowles'. Indeed, Conan Doyle's narrative focuses on the mesmeric power of a woman whose true identity as a werewolf drives men to madness.

sexuality, sadism and diabolism outraged both the late-Victorian reading public and the contemporary reviewers.⁸⁰² Amused by the scandal, Machen made light of the wealth of negative reviews, using his introduction to *The Great God Pan* to explain how 'the fun would begin' at breakfast when he would 'find this sort of thing [the reviews] waiting' for him.⁸⁰³ He even quoted the most amusing remarks, stating how the *Manchester Guardian* declared the book to be 'the most acutely and disagreeable we have yet seen in English. We could say more, but refrain from doing so for fear of giving such a work advertisement' while the *Ladies Pictorial* claimed the work to be 'gruesome, ghastly and dull'.⁸⁰⁴ Explaining how he 'religiously preserved',⁸⁰⁵ even the most negative of reviews, what was important for Machen was that his work was receiving critical attention. Having spent so long dreaming of recognition, *The Great God Pan* provided Machen with the success that he sought. Unfortunately for Machen, however, it was, as John Sutherland describes, his work's status as 'the quintessence of "yellowbookery"' which would have unwanted consequences.⁸⁰⁶ Indeed, Oscar Wilde's 1895 public disgrace for gross indecency made the Decadent style and its links with the Yellow Book, with which Wilde was closely associated,

⁸⁰² For further information see, Alice Catherine Cassazza's 'Arthur Machen's Treatment of the Occult and a Consideration of its Reception in England and America' (Doctoral Thesis, University of Southern California, 1971)

⁸⁰³ Arthur Machen, 'Introduction' in *The Great God Pan and The Hill of Dreams* (New York: Dover Publications, 2006), pp. 1-8 (p. 7).

⁸⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸⁰⁶ On a basic level, the Yellow Book was a periodical published by John Lane from 1894-7. Illustrated with distinctive images by Aubrey Beardsley, it was a periodical of short stories, poetry, illustrations, and essays associated with both French fiction and discussing the issue of the New Woman. It was also closely associated with the Decadent movement. For further information on the Yellow Book see, for example, Ledger and Luckhurst, *The Fin de Siècle*. Moreover, the Decadent movement was a term for the literary and arts movement which occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. As John Sutherland in *Victorian Fiction* explains, 'Pessimism is a dominant mood and hedonism the dominant philosophy [...]. Urban decay and racial decline were favourite subject-matters. In their psychology, the decadent writers were fascinated by the dark places of the human mind [...]. A cultish interest in diabolism was also associated with the movement' (p. 177). An excellent analysis of Decadent elements in Arthur Machen is Christine Ferguson's 'Decadence as Scientific Fulfilment', *PMLA: Publication of the Modern Language Association of America*, n.s. 117:3 (May 2002), pp. 465-78 while Sage Leslie-McCarthy's 'Re-Vitalising the Little People' locates Machen's work as 'part of the late Victorian *fin de siècle* trend towards Gothic decadence' (p. 68).

distinctly unpopular.⁸⁰⁷ As Roger Luckhurst notes, '[a]lthough published in the Keynote series by The Bodley Head, the defining Decadent series, he [Machen] [...] strongly disassociated himself from the literature of the 1890s'.⁸⁰⁸ Once again, therefore, Arthur Machen seemed to slip back into obscurity: it seems that the diabolical and sexual elements of Helen Vaughan's portrayal positioned the work within the Decadent Movement: *The Great God Pan* was too controversial for a society still shaken by the Oscar Wilde scandal. Coinciding with the text's overt emphasis on ancient esoteric magic practices, however, is a pseudo-scientific aspect which insidiously but insistently haunts the central narrative.

Regardless of the disconcerting occult framework of *The Great God Pan*, it is a pseudo-scientific operation that is the cause of Mary's nightmare experience. The title of the original short story, 'The Experiment', implies that scientific exploration was Machen's initial idea. In the short story, Dr. Raymond convinces Mr. Clarke to observe his pioneering brain experiment on Mary, declaring that 'I have devoted myself to transcendental medicine for [...] years. I have heard myself called quack and charlatan and impostor, but [...] I knew I was on the right path' (p. 9). Beneath the scientific apparel, however, something unorthodox is about to take place: secrecy overshadows the operation, suggesting that Dr. Raymond's reputation as a fraud has driven his research into 'the physiology of the brain' (p. 10) underground. But it quickly becomes apparent that Dr. Raymond's intended experiment is far from purely scientific. His desire to make a 'trifling rearrangement of certain [brain] cells' (p. 10)

⁸⁰⁷ For further information on both the 1895 trial of Oscar Wilde and his literary associations with the Decadent movement see, for example, Owen Dudley Edwards, 'Wilde, Oscar Fingal O'Flahertie Wills (1854–1900)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). Available at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29400> [accessed 22 Oct 2009].

⁸⁰⁸ Luckhurst, 'Introduction', p. xxix.

so that his patient, Mary, may lift the veil of 'shadows that hide the real world from our eyes' and achieve what the ancients termed as 'seeing the god Pan' (p. 10). In other words, therefore, gaining contact with the supernatural world of the gods, blurs the boundaries between Victorian science and pseudo-science. The ancient past invades the present as Dr. Raymond's quest to unlock the secrets of ancient medicine allies science with ancient and inexplicable non-Christian occult practices. In addition to Dr. Raymond's obsession to connect Mary with the immortal god Pan, there is also a sense that he wishes to reach into the world of the dead. For example, he believes that 'for the first time since man was made, a spirit will gaze on a spirit-world' (p. 12); Dr. Raymond wants to use science in order to release Mary's soul from the confines of her body, communicating with a previously untouchable spirit-sphere, and a suggestively mystical element is present. As Vincent Starrett observes, Machen created a narrative of 'life and death [...] and of life-in-death and death-in-life'. The complexities of *The Great God Pan* respond to the contemporary interest in life after death. A suggestively spiritualist element seems, albeit briefly, to inform the discourse.⁸⁰⁹ Inevitably, however, the experiment is not a success. A look of 'awful terror' (p. 16) distorts Mary's features; her 'soul seemed struggling and shuddering' (p. 16) as her vision of Pan, or implicitly Pan himself, invades her body. Science is ineffective in the face of ancient supernatural powers: the occult elements triumph over Dr. Raymond and his Victorian scientific knowledge.

Similarly to Conan Doyle's 'Lot No. 249', throughout *The Great God Pan* logical rationality is shown to be ineffective when confronted with dark and

⁸⁰⁹ Vincent Starrett, *Arthur Machen: A Novelist of Ecstasy and Sin* (Horam: Tartarus Press, 1996), pp. 13-14.

inexplicable occult forces. As Martin Willis notes, although Machen's fiction is often 'considered to be scientific' it is his 'use of ancient esoterica' with its 'distinctive blend of fantasy and magic for which [...] [he is] known'.⁸¹⁰ Nowhere is this more apparent than in the figure of Mr. Clarke. Upheld as a sensible gentleman who had always 'repudiated the doctor's theories as the wildest nonsense' (p. 17), he is positioned as the sceptical observer of Dr. Raymond's eccentricities, and he will ultimately help to destroy the demonic Helen Vaughan, negating the evil effects of the experiment. But there is a twist. Even Clarke's Victorian rationality becomes drawn towards the mystery of ancient occult knowledge; in the aftermath of Dr. Raymond's disastrous operation his blend of 'caution and curiosity' (p. 17) disintegrates into pure inquisitiveness:

[Clarke] was conscious of being involved in an affair not altogether reputable, and for many years afterwards he clung bravely to the commonplace, and rejected all occasions of occult investigation. Indeed, on some homeopathic principle, he for some time attended the *séances* of distinguished mediums, hoping that the clumsy tricks [...] would make him altogether disgusted with occultism of every kind, but the remedy, though casuistic, was not efficacious. Clarke knew that he still pined for the unseen. (p. 17)

Fighting an internal battle between doubt and belief in occult powers, Clarke attempts to rationalise what happened to Mary. Significantly, moreover, his investigations lead him towards spiritualism: as with sceptics such as Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, therefore, Machen (also a disbeliever in the spiritualist movement) makes his protagonist a cynic with regard to the Victorian trend for contacting the dead with occult and quasi-religious techniques. Yet, a lingering belief in the supernatural haunts Mr. Clarke's actions as the narrative suggests that his disbelief in spiritualism is weakened by his *séance* observations.

⁸¹⁰ Martin Willis, 'Scientific Portraits in Magical Frames: The Construction of Preternatural Narrative in the Work of E.T.A. Hoffman and Arthur Machen', *Extrapolation*, n.s. 35:3 (Fall 1994), pp. 186-200.

As in Conan Doyle's Egyptian stories, it seems that the supernatural powers' connection to, or resurrection from, the ancient past is most disconcerting. *The Great God Pan* foregrounds the influence of the Roman civilisation upon the present: a kind of stratification of time occurs. For example, the young Helen Vaughan is sent to a sleepy village 'on the borders of Wales, a place of some importance in the time of the Roman occupation' (p. 19) while a tormented playmate of Helen is found 'senseless on the floor, his face contorted with terror' after finding 'a curious [stone] head, evidently of the Roman period' (p. 21) of 'a faun or satyr' (p. 22).⁸¹¹ This constant referral to an ancient past whose archaeology still shapes the village is a self-conscious technique used by Machen. More specifically, in his introduction to *The Great God Pan*, Machen writes about his home town of Caerleon, explaining how it was 'once the home of the legions, the centre of an exiled Roman culture in the heart of Celtdom' before emphasising how this 'ancient city' was 'the foundation of my story'.⁸¹² Significantly, then, it is a pagan god of this ancient world which shapes Machen's novella, toppling scientific reason and modern society. Pan – originally a pastoral deity of Greek mythology whose counterpart in Roman mythology was Faunus – became, as Patricia Merivale notes, 'not merely the god of shepherds but, in Christian myth, either the devil [...] or, both more important and more surprising, Christ, as shepherd-god himself'.⁸¹³ Pan's depiction throughout history, therefore, has been both complex and contradictory: an unstable figure that has come to represent both good and, as in Machen's work, evil. While the time spent describing the pagan

⁸¹¹ As Lass, Kiremidjian, Goldstein in *Dictionary of Classical and Literary Allusion*, note, satyrs were '[l]esser gods of the forest with bodies of men, legs and feet of goats, hair over all their bodies and short horns on their head [...] and were famous for their lust' (p. 197).

⁸¹² Machen, 'Introduction', p. 4.

⁸¹³ Patricia Merivale, *Pan the Goat-God: His Myth in Modern Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. vii. Another excellent work depicting the ever-changing representations of the pagan god Pan in both literature and art is John Boardman's *The Great God Pan: The Survival of an Image* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

figure of the god Pan in *The Great God Pan* is brief, his effect upon the narrative is substantial: a nightmare chain of events occurs when mortals attempt to unveil the mysteries surrounding his ancient occult religion and powers.

As the narrative progresses, the true extent of Pan's evil influence becomes apparent. While on his quest to unravel the mystery behind the strange Mrs. Beaumont (Helen Vaughan), Mr. Villiers soon learns that seeing the god Pan means unveiling 'the most awful, most secret forces which lie at the heart of all things; forces before which the souls of men must wither and die and blacken' (p. 57). These malevolent energies are inherited by Pan's offspring, Helen Vaughan, who, in spite of her mortal mother, has inherited her father's evil power and uses it to torment her victims. Neither human nor god, she blurs the boundaries between natural and supernatural, wielding an esoteric occult power beyond comprehension. Vaughan is a temptress, leading men astray through her beauty: as her horrified husband, Charles Herbert, tells Mr. Villiers shortly before his death, he is 'a man who has seen hell' (p. 27). Yet, this 'hell' is apparently unspeakable. The narrative resists describing Vaughan's actions, choosing instead to use ambiguous language in order to create an atmosphere of suspense. She is described as killing men through 'sheer terror' after they see 'something so awful, so terrible, that it cut[s] short' their lives, corrupting them body and soul (p. 33). Moreover, her creation by the fiendish god Pan suggests that her darkly secret supernatural powers are essentially demonic: a product of a god depicted in Christian mythology as the devil, Vaughan herself is presented as a devil-child. Dr. Raymond reflects on the consequences of his operation, stating that 'I broke open the door of the house of life, without [...] caring [...] but I forgot that no human

eyes could look on such a vision with impunity' (p. 66). An evil beyond comprehension emerges as a Christian framework begins to shape the narrative.

As *The Great God Pan* progresses, therefore, it becomes clear that some form of demonic possession is controlling Helen Vaughan: her parentage has made her an incarnate evil which must be destroyed. As in the exorcism scene in Edward Bulwer Lytton's *Zanoni* (1846) – where Zanoni's powers are used to release the possessed Glyndon from the Dweller of the Threshold – Machen's novella foregrounds related themes. Indeed, when Mr. Clarke and Mr. Villiers finally realise the shocking truth behind Helen Vaughan, their reaction is to expel the devil by forcing Vaughan to strangle herself with a hempen cord. But nothing prepares them for the consequences:

[t]he skin, and the flesh, and the muscles, and the bones, and the firm structure of the human body that I had thought to be unchangeable, and permanent as adamant, began to melt and dissolve [...] some internal force, of which I knew nothing, [...] cause dissolution and change. [...] I saw the form waver from sex to sex [...] [t]hen I saw the body descend to the beasts whence it ascended. (p. 62)

The body becomes completely corrupted as the evil is exorcised, dissolving the proper boundaries between female/male, human/animal and natural/supernatural. The religious discourse which shapes this disconcerting exorcism scene shifts as an almost Darwinian element influences the language: Helen Vaughan undergoes a form of reversion back to her animal origins. The tentative hints towards reverse evolution in Arthur Conan Doyle's Egyptian narratives, 'The Ring of Thoth' and 'Lot No. 249', are taken one step further: the process of reverse evolution is actually acted out in Machen's *The Great God Pan*. Unexpectedly, as Bernadette Lynn Bosky notes, 'Machen identifies a kind of transcendence with a kind of de-evolution' as Helen

Vaughan becomes 'de-evolved to slime'.⁸¹⁴ Machen's demonic possession, subsequent exorcism and final destruction of Vaughan moves away from the Christian discourse towards scientific imagery connected with evolution. In a late-Victorian society accustomed to Darwinian theories of evolution by natural selection, new fears regarding the reversion, or devolution, of the human race back to its less developed ancestors troubled the literature of the period. While Machen's allusion to devolution is brief, there is nevertheless a sense that scientific theories of species development inform this Gothic narrative: an unsettling blend of pseudo-science, occult, Christian and Darwinian elements help to create *The Great God Pan*, suggesting that its controversial juxtaposition of so many disconcerting images could go some way to explain why it received such damning reviews.

Similarly to the spiritualism which underlies Conan Doyle's Egyptian short stories, there is a sense that Machen's extensive occult cataloguing, interest in spiritualism and brief affiliation with the Order of the Golden Dawn gave him an intimacy with esoteric non-Christian religions which inflects his Gothic novella. Importantly, unlike Hardy and Eliot, both Conan Doyle and Machen suggest that interfering with old religions and the supernatural is dangerous in the wrong hands, implying that they may believe in the superstitions. Essentially, Conan Doyle's support for the new religion of spiritualism and Machen's decision to leave the Order of the Golden Dawn seem to signify that ancient esoteric knowledge may not be necessary in the modern world.

⁸¹⁴ Bernadette Lynn Bosky, 'Slime and the Sublime: Transcendence and De-evolution in Peter Straub's and Arthur Machen's Fiction' in *Fantastic Odysseys: Selected Essays from the Twenty-Second International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, ed. Mary Pharr (London: Praeger, 2003), pp. 105-13 (p. 109).

Conclusion

The difficulty of maintaining a strong Church of England faith in a climate of doubt intensified in *fin de siècle* England. Consequently, the late-century interest in religion acted as a catalyst for scientific exploration of the spirit world and Christian afterlife. Similarly to the early-Victorian interest in pseudo-science as a way of comprehending religion, late-Victorian society also looked towards science to provide the empirical evidence which society craved: scientific proof was vital. Crucially, therefore, my thesis suggests that Victorian literature went full circle. Paralleling Catherine Crowe's fascination with using scientific means to contact the spirit world, late-Victorian writers Arthur Conan Doyle and Arthur Machen also turned to serious psychic research as a way of explaining the inexplicable aspects of religion, superstition and the supernatural. Yet, Conan Doyle's passion for spiritualism and Arthur Machen's insight into esoteric secret societies distances them from mid-Victorian rational agnostics such as Eliot and Hardy, allowing for a different and less rationally-founded perspective.

While Arthur Machen lived in relative obscurity throughout his lifetime – his late-Victorian Decadent tales were too controversial to allow Machen to become a popular author like his idol, Charles Dickens – perhaps his best known work combined his enthusiasm for the supernatural with reality. One of the most significant events in both world history and in the history of spiritualism was the outbreak of World War One (1914-1918). With mass slaughter becoming a defining feature of the conflict – estimates of the number of soldiers killed range from 8.5 million to 10

million, with over 20 million wounded – this type of warfare was unprecedented.⁸¹⁵ On 29 September 1914, Arthur Machen published an account of the 1914 Battle of Mons in *The Evening News* which became, as Sweetser explains, ‘his one popular success’.⁸¹⁶ Building upon his journalistic research into the facts of the outbreak of World War One, Machen constructed a tale in which the arrows of ghostly celestial archers from the historical Battle of Agincourt – a major battle in which the English defeated the French army in 1415 – were fired towards the German forces at Mons, securing victory for the British. While *The Bowmen* was undoubtedly a patriotic narrative of wish-fulfilment, it occurred at a moment when ‘people were looking for a miracle’, and this fictional account was misconstrued as reality.⁸¹⁷ Spiritualist periodicals such as *The Occult Review* and *Light* supported the account’s veracity, creating a form of hysteria about angelic presence on the battlefield. As Reynolds and Charlton note, ‘people came forward on every side to say that friends and relatives [...] had seen the “Angels of Mons” with their own eyes’.⁸¹⁸ In this climate of war, people looked to religion, in whatever form, for security and answers. Although spiritualist magazines were some of the first to uphold this ghostly account as true, Machen’s *The Bowmen* significantly sold over 50,000 copies in just three months, suggesting that it appealed to a wider audience: a spiritualist and non-spiritualist population were united in their search for solace and answers in the aftermath of the effects of modern warfare.⁸¹⁹

⁸¹⁵ H. P. Willmott, *World War I* (London: Dorling, 2008), p. 307.

⁸¹⁶ Sweetser, *Machen*, p. 37.

⁸¹⁷ Reynolds and Charlton, *Machen*, p. 118.

⁸¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 118.

⁸¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 118. Reynolds and Charlton further argue that *The Bowmen* sold over 100,000 copies in its year of release, cementing its position as Machen’s most popular work.

Conan Doyle was also intrinsically linked to spiritualism throughout World War One, relying on it as a means of coping with personal bereavement. As Conan Doyle himself noted, '[m]any people had never heard of Spiritualism until the period that began in 1914, when into so many homes the Angel of Death entered suddenly'.⁸²⁰ By contrast to the Christian promise of spiritual life after death, the spiritualists claimed to offer evidence of the afterlife: grieving families were given the opportunity to communicate with loved ones, easing the trauma of the World War One slaughter and allowing for a sense of closure. Moreover, J. M. Winter observes that this enthusiasm for spiritualism was not limited to grieving relatives: the horror of 'the trenches could not easily be explained in conventional theological [...] terms. For this reason a host of spiritualist images [...] and legends proliferated [...] among British [...] [troops]'.⁸²¹ Conan Doyle mourned the loss of his eldest son, Kingsley, and his brother, Innes, who were both killed in the conflict. Writing to his mother on 9 May 1917, Conan Doyle confesses that 'I do not fear death for the boy [Kingsley], for since I became a convinced Spiritualist death became rather an unnecessary thing, but I fear pain',⁸²² while in his memoirs he recollects a *séance* in which 'my son came back to me' shortly before '[m]y brother, General Doyle, came back with the same medium'.⁸²³ What becomes apparent therefore, is that late-Victorian interest in the

⁸²⁰ Conan Doyle, *History of Spiritualism*, II, p. 224.

⁸²¹ J. M. Winter 'Spiritualism and the First World War' in *Religion and Society: Essays in Honour of R. K. Webb*, ed. R. W. Davies and R. J. Helmstadler (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 185-200 (p.191). In this article Winter also explains how Arthur Machen's *The Angel of Mons: The Bowmen and Other Legends of the War* (1915) described the appearance of angelic figures over the battlefields and although he claimed to have 'made it up while daydreaming during a sermon on Sunday early in the war' the story 'took on a life of its own' (p. 191), adding to the spiritualist claims that there was life after a war death. For further information on the contemporary response to this work see David Clarke's 'Rumours of Angels: A Response to Simpson', *Folklore*, n.s. 115:1 (April 2004), pp. 99-104.

⁸²² Doyle, *A Life in Letters*, p. 625.

⁸²³ Doyle, *Memories and Adventures*, p. 402.

progress of the soul after death provided the foundation for the spiritualist activities which intensified in the aftermath of World War One.⁸²⁴

Essentially, then, this thesis suggests that what lies beneath the surface of rational and scientific developments embodied in events such as the 1851 Great Exhibition, Darwinian theories of evolution by natural selection and scientific advancements, is a fascination with the inexplicable. Spirit worlds, pseudo-science and esoteric quasi-religions are positioned as the dark shadow of a Victorian culture which prided itself on rationality. In a sense, therefore, the Victorian drive to understand the inexplicable deconstructs itself. In pursuit of rationality, society still turns to irrational methods and ideas which is reflected in works by both canonical and marginal authors throughout the Victorian period: things come full circle by the end of the nineteenth century as the interest the inexplicable which shaped Edward Bulwer Lytton's early-Victorian occult fiction can still be traced in *fin-de-siècle* fiction.

Indeed, as the Victorian era drew to a close and a new century began, other routes to understanding the unknown began to open, particularly in the early-twentieth century psychoanalytical work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939): new ways of seeking 'what lies beneath' emerge. More specifically, the bi-partite soul – the notion that good and bad elements coexist in every human soul – seems to shape, for example, Bulwer Lytton's occult protagonist Zanoni, Maggie Tulliver and her repressed sexual desires and Eustacia Vye's unconventionality and paganism. Although Victorian

⁸²⁴ Other notable literary figures who turned to spiritualism after the death of a child are, for example, W. T. Stead, whose son died in 1907 and Rudyard Kipling who, like Arthur Conan Doyle, lost his son in World War I. For further information see J. M. Winter's 'Spiritualism and the First World War' and Roger Luckhurst's 'W. T. Stead's Occult Economies'.

anxieties surrounding the soul, the afterlife and repression are expressed through the discourse of witchcraft, paganism and ancient religions, these issues can be retrospectively explained by Freud's theorisation of the unconscious and the divided self. A new emphasis on 'what lies beneath' the individual psyche replaces the Victorian preoccupation with exploring communal spirit worlds and the afterlife. Freud's 1899 publication, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, recognised and recounted attempts to access repressed memories in the unconscious mind. Freud's experiments with patients triggered a movement towards understanding human nature through psychoanalysis.⁸²⁵ Ultimately, therefore, Freud's work continues the stereotypically Victorian need to categorise, classify and create narratives of rationality in a twentieth century Western context, but turns inwards in a very modern way to the individual rather than outwards to external sources of meaning and being. Significantly, there is perhaps a sense that Hardy's use of superstition prefigures Freud's concept of the unconscious in the way it suggests the physical effect of the mind on the body of others – Susan Nunsuch's preoccupation with superstitious witchcraft, for example, is manipulated as a means of harming Eustacia.⁸²⁶ A psychoanalytic discourse was not, of course, available to the texts I have explored in context: their anxieties surrounding

⁸²⁵ Psychoanalysis and the impact of Freud on the history of sexology is discussed by Jeffrey Weeks in *Sexuality and its Discontents: Meanings, Myths and Modern Sexualities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995). In this work the critic argues that psychoanalysis is important because it directly challenges conventional concepts of sexuality and gender; it is concerned with the unconscious and desire, suggesting that irresponsible instincts control the body. For more information on Freud see, Sigmund Freud, *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (London: Vintage, 1995).

⁸²⁶ While my thesis explores selected works of Thomas Hardy in context, the issue of psychoanalysis and Hardy's fiction has been the focus of a variety of critical works. For further information see, for example, Anne Alexander, *Thomas Hardy: the 'Dream-Country' of his Fiction* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1987); Rosemary Sumner, *Thomas Hardy: Psychological Novelist* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991); Robert Langbaum, *Thomas Hardy in Our Time* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995); Geoffrey Harvey, *The Complete Critical Guide to Thomas Hardy* (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 167-74; Mary Ellen Jordan, 'Thomas Hardy's *Return of the Native*: Clym Yeobright and Melancholia', *American Imago: Studies in Psychoanalysis and Culture*, n.s. 39:2, Summer 1982, pp. 101-118; Jeff Massey, 'Why Wildeve Had to Die: Mimetic Triangles and Violent Ends in *The Return of the Native*', *Hardy Review*, n.s. 3 (2000), pp. 117-26; Barbara A. Schapiro, 'Psychoanalysis and Romantic Idealization: The Dialectics of Love in Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*', *American Imago* n.s. 59:1 (2002), pp. 3-26; Shirley A. Martin, '"He knew Psychoanalysis": Thomas Hardy and the Paradox of Degeneracy in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*', *PsyArt*, n.s.9 (2005) (no pagination);

the bi-partite soul, repression and the afterlife are seen rather in terms of the supernatural combined with a dark imagery of pseudo-science and witchcraft.

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